THE MYSTERY OF HORNBY HALL

ANNA T. SADLIER

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BY

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Mayfair	7
II.	Hornby Hall	20
III.	Marjorie Describes Her Visit	34
IV.	The Coming of Mary Pemberton	46
V.	Mary Is Introduced to Mayfair	59
VI.	Mr. and Mrs. Morton Recall the Past	71
VII.	Mr. Morton Forms a Plan	83
VIII.	Mary's First Time at Church	95
IX.	Mr. Morton Holds a Meeting in Mayfair	106
X.	The Long Barn	114
XI.	The Loft over the Long Barn and What Was in It	125
XII.	Mrs. Miles Plays a Comedy	138
XIII.	Preparations for the Great Event	146
XIV.	A Delightful Festivity	157
XV.	Mary Is a Center of Attraction	165
XVI.	Mrs. Miles Grows Desperate	175
XVII.	Visitors to Hornby Hall	189
XVIII.	Mr. Morton's Tale, Which Unveils the Mystery	200

The Mystery of Hornby Hall.

CHAPTER I.

MAYFAIR.

"I WOULDN'T live at Hornby, with old Mr. Pemberton, like that poor Mary, for anything!"

The speaker was Marjorie Morton, who nodded her head till her curls fell in a wild tangle about her face, though she was a "great girl" now, as her father told her, and too tall to climb trees. That was just what she had done, however, at the moment, and she was seated upon a high bough, swinging to and fro with the keenest enjoyment.

"She must be a queer sort of girl," said Dick Dalton, a tall, fair boy, who was just beginning to be careful about the cut of his clothes and the trimming of his hair. "I should like to see her."

"Well, I wish you could go, then, this afternoon, instead of me," responded Marjorie from her perch.

"Are you going *there*?" cried Dick, and a chorus of voices repeated the inquiry.

The two Wallace boys, Ned and George, who had

been assiduously engaged with Luke Morris in playing an impromptu game of baseball, stopped to hear the reply, and so did the Lewis girls, Marie and Florence, who were busy deciphering a puzzle which Jack Holland had put on paper for them. Jack was, at least in his own opinion, a very conspicuous figure in the little circle of boys and girls who were accustomed to meet almost daily in this pleasant field, with its clump of shade trees, which they had christened Mayfair. Jack was a slim, tall, eager-eyed youth, who like his chum Dick Dalton rejoiced in an immaculate collar of noticeable height, and had begun to speak of Marjorie and others of the little group as "kids."

"Hello!" said Jack after a pause, following the exclamation with a long whistle.

"Why shouldn't I go to Hornby?" asked Marjorie cooly, though she fully enjoyed the sensation she had created.

"Why?" answered Jack, sharply. There was something of a feud between him and the girl, who had not sufficient respect for the young collegian's good clothes and grown-up ways. "Why? Because nobody's set foot there for years and your folks have been dead cuts with the Pembertons ever since."

"Well, we're going," declared Marjorie, looking loftily down, with an air which made even the boy's collar appear insignificant. "We're going to call. Mother has ordered the carriage for three."

"You're going to call!" cried Dick scornfully—"a kid like you? You mean, I suppose, that Aunt Lucy's going to call and is taking you with her for the drive."

"You are rude, Dick, but boys will be boys," retorted Marjorie with dignity. "I am going to see Miss Mary Pemberton."

Dick threw himself down upon the grass and rolled over, laughing, while Jack resented the little girl's air of superiority and looked angrily at the dainty figure in the tree. Marjorie, for her part, rode her mimic horse with perfect equanimity, shaking the bough of the ancient oak till the tree leaves danced in the sunlight and a shower fell upon the grass below. Catching the vexed look upon Jack's face, Marjorie promptly made up a ball of leaves and aimed it so well at the enemy that his immaculate collar was struck.

"You stop that!" cried Jack wrathfully, as he carefully brushed off the leaves and felt the surface of his neck-gear, to be sure that the celluloid polish of which he was so proud had not been destroyed.

"You stop that, I say, Marjorie," he repeated angrily, as he saw she was about to prepare another missile. But he thought it prudent to take himself out of her reach. For he knew that if Marjorie thought fit to continue the sport he could do nothing to hinder her. It would be impossible to fight with a girl, especially as he did not care to make himself ridiculous before Miss Marie Lewis.

She was the daughter of a wealthy banker, a comparatively new arrival in the place, and, in a word, the latest sensation. Having secured himself against attack, Jack bent once more over the puzzle, explaining to Marie and her sister with his patronizing schoolboy manner exactly how it should be worked. Marjorie felt the futility of any further warfare in that particular line, but she had a lively tongue and soon began to pelt her vanquished foe with a variety of rhyming epithets, which made the self-conscious lad furious:

"Jack, so handy,
He's a dandy,
Dotes on candy!"

Jack's silence was intensely dignified, while Marjorie presently made a change in her ditty:

"Jack, be nimble,
Jack, be quick,
Jack, jump over the candlestick!"

"You were nimble enough getting behind the tree, Jack," went on Marjorie. "You see, Marie, he can't have a good, honest fight because you're here. He used to just pelt me back again with leaves. But now he's trying to pretend he's grown up, because he goes to college and wears a collar so high that it nearly chokes him."

"You little wretch!" Jack muttered under his breath. "I'll pay you back for this somehow or another!"

Dick Dalton laughed aloud, as he lay on the grass looking up at the sky, and Marjorie, unrelenting, sang on:

"Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water;
Jack fell down and broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after!"

Marjorie broke off with a laugh, as she cried out: "Oh, wouldn't I love to see Jack tumbling down a hill. He's so mighty dignified and conceited."

All the children were laughing by this time, even Mary Lewis, who was what is generally described as a "sweet girl" and hated to hurt any one's feelings.

"And you are a rude, detestable child!" cried Jack, losing his temper completely. "You ought to have your ears boxed and be sent off to bed."

"Softly, Jack," said Dick, turning his head and looking up lazily at his chum. "I can't stand that, you know. I won't have you talking that way to my cousin."

"You won't, eh?" roared Jack. "Well, stand up and let me thrash you as I can't thrash her."

"I'll fight you any time you like," responded Dick sternly, "but not before girls."

"Fight?" exclaimed Marie Lewis in distress. "Oh, surely, you wouldn't do that."

"Oh, certainly not before you!" answered Jack. "I beg your pardon—I quite forgot myself."

He took off his hat and bowed to her with his best college air. But Marjorie's sharp eyes saw from the tree-top the look Jack gave Dick and that which Dick returned, and heard the whisper: "After supper!"

She promptly came down from her perch, slim and dainty in her blue chambray frock, and walked straight up to Jack.

"I was very rude and provoking," she said, holding out her hand, "but I was only in fun and you mustn't be angry!"

Jack's anger was very swift and sudden, but it never lasted. Marjorie had hurt his vanity by her ill-timed jests before these town-bred girls. Yet he

was easily appeased, the more especially that he was already sorry for having got into a quarrel with his best friend, Dick, and with an uncertain prospect of results, too. For though Jack was no mean fighter and had plenty of pluck, Dick was noted for his strong arm and matchless coolness.

"Oh, I suppose it's all right, Marjorie," he answered in an exaggerated tone of patronage; "kids will be kids, but remember after this that children should be seen and not heard."

"You are really a ridiculous boy," Marjorie exclaimed, eyeing him critically, "but you hear, Dick, we've made it up. I take back all I said about Jack's being nimble and a dandy and handy and falling to break his crown."

There was the light of mirth in her eyes as she made the apology and added, speaking for her late opponent: "And Jack takes back, of course, all the rude things he said to me."

"I suppose I must," Jack conceded; "and I have no quarrel with you, Dick."

"That's all right, old fellow," responded Dick heartily, "and I'm glad of it. There's always enough shindies with other chaps to keep one's hands in."

"I wonder why boys are always wanting to

fight," observed Marie, with her little, affected voice which she used on occasions.

"Why do puppies try to bark and ducks to swim?" answered Marjorie; "it's their nature; they don't seem happy without fighting and probably it does them good, once in a while."

Marie opened her blue eyes very wide.

"You surely are not in earnest," she cried. "Oh, you shocking child!"

"Does that shock you?" Marjorie inquired. "I can't help it even if it does. I think some boys would grow into great big bullies if there weren't other boys to keep them in order. We couldn't do it, you know."

"I should hope not!" exclaimed Marie, looking at the boys for sympathy, out of her large, light-blue eyes, but Dick was chasing a stray cat and Jack looked gloomily abstracted. He was not sure that he had come well out of the affair. The three others were busy with their ball.

"Girls are ever so much nicer than boys," Marjorie declared; "I'm just as glad I've no brothers. Cousin Dick isn't so bad as some, but still he's not nearly so nice as if he were a girl."

Florence Lewis, who had not the china-doll prettiness of her sister, but was of a sociable disposition

and destined to become a great favorite with the Mayfair boys and girls before the summer was over, answered promptly in her cheerful fashion:

"Boys have their good points, Marjorie. We've a lot of brothers and I'm only sorry that they're so much away at school."

"Perhaps if I had brothers I might like them better," Madge agreed, "and I don't think boys are so bad till they go to college and begin to fancy themselves men."

Jack thought it wise to take no notice of the insinuation contained in this speech. He let his eager eyes follow the Wallace boys and Luke Morris in their game and Dicky in the cat chase. For he was, after all, a boy at heart and, whatever he might pretend, was still engrossed with a boy's aims and interest.

"Good for you, Luke!" he cried, rising to his feet in the excitement of the game. "A good catch, old fellow, a good catch!"

His face lighted up with interest, his eyes flashed, he clapped his hands with enthusiasm.

"How much better you look, Jack, when you are just a boy," observed Marjorie, regarding him sympathetically. "I think you'd make rather a nice girl, too, you change around so soon."

Jack reddened to the eyes and walked away with dignity, and Marjorie laughed as she looked across the road to the brick-paved stable-yard which flanked the Mortons' house. She jumped up hastily.

"My, there's Jerry going to harness the horses!" she cried. "I must run and dress. Going to call on people is a bother. I'd rather stay here. Good-bye, girls."

"Good-bye," said Florence; "we'll just be dying to hear what that strange place is like."

"Oh, yes," added Marie, "and the girl."

"Unless you get eaten up, come out after supper to-night and tell us all about it," Jack called after her.

"If children should be seen and not heard, how can I tell you all about it?" flashed Marjorie back at him from the middle of the road. "I don't believe I'll tell you anything."

"She will though, for all that," Jack declared, confidently. "She's good-natured and never keeps spite. Only she's such a kid and talks through her hat."

As Marjorie was out of hearing, there was no answer forthcoming, fortunately for the peace of that green and sunny Mayfair, which the half-jest-

ing squabbles of the young people indeed only served to enliven.

So, while the sun shone down through the branches of the trees overhead, making a checker-work upon the soft grass underfoot, the boys and girls turned their eager attention upon the Mortons' house, which was directly opposite, and presently they saw the carriage roll out at the gate, and Marjorie sitting up very straight beside her mother. She looked very well in her soft white dress, the tangle of curls being smoothed out considerably under her leghorn hat and a blue sunshade in her hand.

"Marjorie is like a fairy queen in a book!" cried Florence, half mischievously, half admiringly.

"She's very pretty," assented Marie.

"Marjorie's well enough," pronounced Dick, carelessly. "She's lots of fun, though, and looks don't matter, anyway."

The Lewis girls now left the boys in undisturbed possession of the field, and soon Jack and Dick had off their uncomfortable collars, and their jackets as well, and were as deep in the game of baseball as any one.

"Girls are a bother anyhow," declared Jack, abandoning his company manners. "They're a perfect pest to have around."

"Marjorie is good fun," argued Dick, stoutly. "There's no nonsense about her and she doesn't care whether we've got collars on or not."

"Yes, she's the right sort," agreed Ned Wallace, "and she can throw a ball as well as anybody."

"And run," put in George Wallace.

"And play cricket," added Luke Morris.

"Oh, well," commented Dick, "she'll have to give up all that sort of thing now. She's getting big and she's to go to boarding-school in September."

"She'll come back just like those stuck-up Lewis girls, who sit up like dolls, afraid to get their dresses spoiled," grumbled Luke Morris. "I hate girls like that."

"Marie Lewis is all right," Jack pronounced, with some warmth. "She's a very sweet girl."

"Trying to pretend she's a big lady," grunted Luke; "she's too sweet to be wholesome."

"Shut up, Luke!" exclaimed Dick, "we don't want any bickering in Mayfair. We've had a jolly time so far together."

"That's so," agreed the Wallaces, "I guess we'd miss any of the crowd if they went away."

While this talk was going on in the pleasant meeting-place of Mayfair, the carriage rolled along the smooth road, making more than one winding

and finally turned in at the gate of Hornby Hall, as the Pemberton residence was called. Why, in this democratic village in the heart of Pennsylvania, the dwelling should have received the aristocratic appellation it was hard to say.

Marjorie, who was quite pale with excitement and something like fear, sat very still by her mother's side. She trembled when Jerry got down from the box and mounted the steps. The man himself was not quite free from apprehension, such were the tales that were told in all the countryside about this mysterious dwelling. Marjorie felt as if her heart would stand still in that breathless moment after Jerry had rung the bell, and she fancied that her mother was not altogether at ease either, which was indeed the case.

"I wish I were back in Mayfair, with the boys and girls!" she said to herself, recalling how brightly the sun had been shining on the green grass. Here everything seemed damp and cold and, as Marjorie expressed it, "ghostly." For no one had raked up the dead leaves of last autumn and there they were on the paths, brown and sere, sending forth a mouldy odor as they rotted away, and choking the fresh shoots of grass which vainly attempted to rear their heads.

CHAPTER II.

HORNBY HALL.

THE bell went clanging, with harsh, discordant sound, through wastes of dreariness. It seemed to Marjorie as if its angry tones must bring some malign shapes from their lurking-places to confront the daring intruders. At last the door was opened by an old woman, with silvery hair and a peculiar, ashen whiteness of face. It seemed as if the color of her hair had been bleached out of it by some special process; and Marjorie wondered if it could have turned white in a single night. For surely it had not the natural appearance of hair that had lost its color in the slow passage of years.

Jerry asked, with a voice which had a tremor in it, if Mr. Pemberton was at home.

"Mr. Pemberton," responded the woman, with a ghastly laugh which showed toothless gums, "where else should he be but at home? He can't put a foot under him."

Mrs. Morton here bent forward and said to the old woman:

"Ask if he will see Mrs. Morton and—her little girl, and say also that they would both like to see Miss Mary Pemberton."

The woman went away and Mrs. Morton leaned back in the carriage, with the air of one who is accomplishing a dreaded duty, and as she slowly looked around her she thought of the past, when Hornby Hall had been a place of merrymaking and she a young girl, coming here for a ball, or setting out upon some expedition with a merry party of young people from that very hall-door, which now seemed to frown upon her with gloomy severity.

Marjorie could, of course, have no idea of the curious sensation with which her mother mounted those once familiar steps, but she herself felt, as she afterward explained to an interested audience, as if she were stepping into an exciting but rather frightful story-book. What the next page of that book would disclose she could not guess, but she presently followed her mother into a dark and sombre-looking room. There were pictures of stern-faced men upon the wall, and one of a girl in a ball-dress of pink, with a bouquet of roses in her hand and a certain, delicate charm in features

which yet were irregular, in eyes which must have been luminous in the living person, and in lips that smiled, half-parted.

Marjorie stared at this portrait with fascination. It seemed so utterly out of keeping with its surroundings, just as she felt her own white dress and dainty ribbons to be. Presently a peculiar, grating sound came to the listeners' ears and an old man was wheeled into the room in an invalid's chair by a servant white-haired and portentously solemn.

"Everything is so old here," Marjorie thought whimsically, "I wonder if the girl will be old, too, and, perhaps, have white hair."

But her thoughts were distracted from the girl, who had not yet appeared, and riveted with a kind of terror upon the old man, already before her. His pointed chin and hooked nose, his swarthy complexion and sneering smile terrified her. He sat surveying Marjorie's mother in silence, and the girl noticed that the rich color faded from Mrs. Morton's cheek under the gaze, which she silently returned. After a long pause, the old man began, in a hissing, sibilant voice that made Marjorie tremble:

"And so, Lucy Watson—or should I say Lucy Morton?—you have come at last to see me."

"I have come, as you say, to see you," Mrs. Morton responded, "and also to see Mary Pemberton, my dead friend's child."

The old man laughed, a low and not unmusical laugh.

"Put it as plainly as you will," he observed, "that seeing me is but the necessary step to seeing the child, Mary Pemberton. As, however, you have taken this necessary step, your object shall be attained."

He touched a bell which stood near him on a table, emitting a sharp, imperative sound, which brought the old servant as promptly as though a spring had impelled him inside the door.

"Let Miss Pemberton come here at once—at once, I say."

The man withdrew and Mary Pemberton appeared, with an almost magical speed it seemed to Marjorie. A queer fancy came into her mind that this old man kept all these figures upon springs and jerked each one into his presence when he willed.

To Marjorie's relief, however, Mary Pemberton was not old. An involuntary glance at the newcomer's hair showed it to be of a natural color. Her face, indeed, was pale, like that of one unaccustomed to the open air, and beside the rich

brown of Marjorie's own cheeks seemed wan. Marjorie's eyes turned instantly from the face of the girl to that of the picture. There was a curious resemblance between the two. It seemed as though this living Mary Pemberton were a faded image of the brilliant young figure in the ball-dress.

"This is Mary Pemberton!" announced the old man, transfixing his granddaughter with a look, once more giving the impression that he was jerking her forward by some secret spring. For she moved mechanically to Mrs. Morton's side. The latter took her hand and kissed her.

"I was your mother's best friend, my dear," she said.

The young girl's face took on a startled expression, like that of one awakened from sleep. But the old man's voice jerked her round again till she stood facing him, trembling perceptibly as she met his cold gaze.

"She is, if you please, Lucy Morton, unaccustomed to sentiment. Sentiment is a weed which no longer grows at Hornby Hall. We have uprooted it with other noxious plants. Mary Pemberton, shake hands with that child yonder."

Mary Pemberton advanced toward Marjorie, who felt about as much pleasure in touching her

hand as if the girl were a ghost. She seemed a part of the mystery, the terror, the eerie tales which for more than a generation had spread about the countryside. And yet there was a curious interest and fascination in watching this young plant of an unreal atmosphere, who sat so still in a dingy-colored linen frock, neat and fitting well a symmetrical little figure, but unrelieved by any touch of color. Mary on her part took in with keenly observant eyes every detail of her visitor's dainty costume with a curious sickening at heart. Those bright-colored ribbons, that soft, becoming white, were a revelation to her of possibilities outside the walls of Hornby.

Mr. Pemberton watched the meeting between the two girls with a smile that lent a new malignity to his face and he noted the dissimilarity in their costumes, remarking upon it in a terse sentence:

"The grub and the butterfly!"

Marjorie, usually glib of tongue, did not know what to say, especially in presence of the terrible grandfather, to this unknown quantity of a child, who might have been a century old so far did she seem removed from the gay and lighthearted company of boys and girls from whom Marjorie had come.

"Your granddaughter has lived very much alone," observed Mrs. Morton.

The old man's face clouded on hearing the title given the girl.

"*Mary Pemberton* has, as you say, lived very much alone," he said.

"Well, I would like to change all that, if you will let me," Mrs. Morton pleaded. "I would like to bring Mary into companionship with other children of her own age."

"A very doubtful benefit," commented the old man, eyeing Mrs. Morton with his cold stare.

"I can not agree with you," Mrs. Morton exclaimed warmly, though, indeed, she had very little hope of persuading the old man to permit such companionship. Surprises were, however, in store for her.

"Argument, as you may perhaps remember, was never tolerated in Hornby Hall," Mr. Pemberton reminded her sternly.

Mrs. Morton remembered very well that by its master at least argument had never been tolerated and, oh, the dark tales that had gathered around that iron will of his. The autocrat was silent for an interval, during which his mind was busy following out an idea which had come to him when

he perceived the contrast between the apparel of the two girls and was, moreover, aware that Mary saw and felt it. At last he spoke:

"To prove that Mary Pemberton is not a prisoner, as many of you charitable country folk have conjectured, and that Hornby Hall is not precisely a jail, whatever you may believe to the contrary, Mary Pemberton shall accept whatever invitation you may see fit to extend to her."

Mrs. Morton was silent a moment from sheer amazement, while the old man, leaning back in his chair, toyed with a pair of gold-rimmed glasses suspended around his neck by a black ribbon, and regarded her sarcastically. Meanwhile Marjorie had entered into conversation with the strange child.

"Do you go to school?" she asked.

Mary Pemberton shook her head.

"No," she replied, and there was a wistful tone in her voice. This girl, she reflected, who had come in from the outer brightness attired like some brilliantly colored bird she had seen flitting about the garden, had been to school and had played all her life with other children.

"But how—how do you learn lessons, then?" Marjorie asked.

"Mrs. Miles teaches me."

"Oh, you have a governess!" Marjorie exclaimed, and Mary did not undeceive her, though that title could scarce have been applied to the woman in question. "Well, it would be nice in some ways learning at home, but I think after all school is more fun."

"I don't know," responded Mary Pemberton vaguely, and her eyes sought the ground.

"Mary Pemberton has not experienced the joys you speak of, Miss Chatterbox," observed the old man, suddenly addressing Marjorie. She felt or fancied she felt a curious, pricking sensation, as if a snake had stung her, while her eyes were so attracted to the hard old face that she felt they could never be withdrawn again. Marjorie had not known he was listening to her conversation with Mary. His attention had been apparently engrossed by what her mother was saying. But Mr. Pemberton possessed the faculty of being able to hear two or three conversations at the same time.

"She is therefore quite unlike your modern young person," the grandfather went on, "and I am afraid will not prove very amusing to a young lady of fashion like yourself."

"Marjorie a young lady of fashion!" Mrs. Mor-

ton cried, with a laugh which sounded unnatural in that gloomy room, "oh, you should see her climbing a tree or running a race with her cousin."

"Ah!" said the old man, "I am afraid Mary Pemberton will be left still farther behind in those achievements. She has not been permitted any such unfeminine performances. She has been accustomed to measure her steps at Hornby Hall, to obey without question, to abstain from unseemly amusements, and in general to order herself by the laws that prevail here. The breaking of a law brings swift punishment and Mary has learned that the way of the transgressor is hard."

He laughed the same mirthless laugh and looked at Mary, who sat motionless with eyes cast down, as though by any sudden movement or by an unguarded glance she might make herself amenable to those unwritten, but ever present laws.

"When can she come?" Mrs. Morton asked shortly. Her old dislike for the man was rising within her so strong that she could no longer dissemble.

"I perceive that I have lost nothing of my old attraction for you, my dear Lucy Watson," laughed Mr. Pemberton, "but in answer to your inquiry I may say that the ogre will permit the maiden to es-

cape as early as to-morrow, which is, I believe, Saturday; and to prove how completely he has relaxed his grip, you may keep her, if you are so minded, for a week."

Mrs. Morton could hardly believe her ears and Marjorie was delighted at the idea of a new companion, even though she was one so different from ordinary girls. So she whispered to Mary, quite gleefully, and almost as if the old man were not there:

"Oh, won't it be nice to have you come to our house for a whole week. I have such a lot of things to show you!"

Mary seemed dazed and did not answer. Mr. Pemberton, touching the spring again by addressing her, caused the girl to face him, mechanically:

"Do you hear, Mary Pemberton?" he said. "You are to bid Mrs. Miles get you ready for to-morrow. You will go from here at four o'clock in the afternoon and remain till that day week at precisely the same hour. See that you are not a minute late, do you hear? I will wait for you with my watch in my hand."

Mary Pemberton only bent her head, but all present knew that the words were engraven on her mind, to be obeyed with the utmost exactitude.

"Don't speak to me on the subject, and don't let me see your face again till you come back," commanded Mr. Pemberton. "Shake hands with the visitors and go instantly to Mrs. Miles."

She did as directed, gliding at once from the room after giving her hand to each of the guests. They were now standing up to go and Mr. Pemberton gave Mrs. Morton two icy fingertips.

"You will, I know, relax all discipline," he said, "and put into the girl's mind sentiment and the sense of color, which are mischievous. They are banished from Hornby Hall, with other pernicious things which deceive and blind the young especially to the actual barrenness and dreariness of life. But I am not afraid to make the experiment. The discipline of Hornby will soon pluck up all such weeds. Mrs. Miles can be trusted for that."

He laughed again, that laugh which was not good to hear.

"I myself do not interfere. I neither punish nor reward. I never praise and but seldom condemn. But I am convinced that Mary Pemberton will better understand what discipline means when she has been for a sufficient time surrounded by color and sentiment. The young are best taught by contrasts."

Mrs. Morton looked at him with a feeling of

deadly repulsion, as though he were some adder which crossed her path. This visit, this holiday, then, was to serve as a new species of torment, a wholesome discipline. Still, even a week would be something, an oasis in a desert life.

"I desire her to grow up in a certain groove," Mr. Pemberton said, noticing and appraising at its full value Mrs. Morton's glance, which gratified him, as an acknowledgment of power. "She will, then, be free, I fancy, from vicissitudes, free from certain tendencies to pleasure and excitement, to gay apparel and cheerful company, which have mocked some lives within these very walls. She will expect little of life and get, of course, nothing."

For one brief instant a feeling akin to pity entered into Mrs. Morton's mind. There was a suggestion of pathos, of the sad shipwreck which had befallen this man of commanding gifts, and almost a note of explanation or of self-justification. But his icy words of farewell and the chill of his personality seemed to follow the mother and daughter out into the warm air full of life and colored sweetness.

"I am afraid of him!" Marjorie murmured, as she clung close to her mother in the carriage. "He is like one of those dreadful old men in fairy-tales, and oh, poor, poor Mary."

The homeward drive was a silent one, but as they drew near the cheerful dwelling of brick, Marjorie said aloud: "I shall never be able to make the girls and boys understand what it is like at Hornby."

CHAPTER III.

MARJORIE DESCRIBES HER VISIT.

THE charmed circle of girls and boys who were privileged to assemble in the pleasant field dignified by the high-sounding name of Mayfair had gathered early on that particular evening to hear of Marjorie's visit to the Pembertons. And there were many more who would have liked to hear the recital, for the news had gone through the village like wild-fire that Mrs. Morton had gone with her young daughter to call at Hornby Hall. Her carriage had been watched by many curious eyes till it disappeared up the long, straight avenue with rows of poplars to the great, staring, white-walled house, so long a center of mysteries for the village. The circumstance had set all the elders a-talking. Not only the gentlefolk, who numbered about a dozen families in all, but also John Tobin, who kept the Riverside Hotel, an old resident and a man of mark after his own fashion, and Jeremiah O'Meara, the baker, who had come straight from Tipperary to this green village in the heart of the Pennsyl-

vania hills, and had served bread and rolls and cake to gentle and simple alike during a period of thirty years.

These had much to say about the visit of that afternoon and the memories to which it gave rise; and so had the widow McBain, a Scotchwoman, who sold needles and thread and other small wares in a very small shop which was a local headquarters for gossip; and William McTeague, the general dealer, and Maurice Burke, the carpenter, and Jim Waller, the cobbler. They formed a coterie of oldest inhabitants, and meeting, though not at Mayfair, they recalled every old story, whether true or false, which had been in circulation during a score or more of years.

Marjorie, however, had her audience, consisting of her own particular little set: the Lewis girls and Dolly Martin, who was Marjorie's chum at school and walked back and forth with her during ten calendar months of the year. Dolly was a plain, freckled, tall girl, in marked contrast to pretty Marie Lewis, but she was very clever at her studies and, because of unfailing good humor, a general favorite. There was also a thin, dark-faced girl, who had a decidedly Jewish cast of countenance, though she was an American by birth and, like the

others, a Catholic in creed. Her name was Kitty Hogan.

The Wallace boys and Luke Morris came running up the road out of breath, so eager were they to hear the news; after them came Hugh Graham, a shy, sandy-complexioned boy, tall for his age and reticent of speech. He in turn was followed by Jack, and Dick Dalton, who vaulted over the fence instead of entering by the gate. Dick, by accident or design, tripped up Jack, who went sprawling almost at Marie Lewis' feet. He rose making a wry face, but put on his best college manner, which Marjorie so much disliked.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Marie," he said, with quite a lofty air.

"I hope you're not hurt," said Marie, with a look of concern from her blue eyes which was quite melting and made the other girls giggle.

"Oh, not at all," Jack answered her, stepping aside to administer a sly kick to Dick Dalton, who already was plying Marjorie with questions.

"There's not so very much to tell after all," Marjorie declared slowly. She sat under the spreading oak, with her tangled curls waving in the breeze and the departing sun shedding a glory about her face. She seemed like some priestess of old with

her circle of disciples round her eagerly hanging on the words of their oracle. Jack's eager eyes were fixed upon her face as he sat upon the grass at her feet side by side with Dick, while the other boys pressed around in a circle and the girls occupied the bench with Marjorie in a variety of attitudes, all expressive of eager attention.

"We drove up the avenue to the door," Marjorie began, with due solemnity, "and Jerry got down and rang. The bell sounded just fearful, echoing through the halls, and then—"

Marjorie paused, overcome by the recollection.

"What?" cried Jack. "Girls take so long to tell a story."

"Shut up, Jack!" cried Dick emphatically if not politely.

"Then," continued Marjorie, taking no notice of the interruption, "an old woman opened the door. Very old she seemed to be, with crinkled white hair and a face that looked as if it had been white-washed."

"Oh!" burst from several of the girls. There seemed something specially ghastly in the idea.

"When we went into a very dark room, with a high ceiling and dull paper on the wall, Mr. Pemberton was wheeled in. He is old too, and white-

haired, and the servant who pushed the chair had white hair too, and then, and then—Mr. Pemberton was rather terrible."

"Terrible!" cried a chorus. "How? What did he say?"

"It wasn't even what he said," Marjorie explained, "but his voice and his awful eyes and his dark face."

The girls were fairly awestruck; the boys in their interest bent forward upon one another's shoulders.

"Stop shoving, there!" cried Jack. "You can hear just as well without breaking my collarbone."

"Keep still, Jack!" shouted Dick. "We want to hear. What did he say?"

"Oh, a lot of disagreeable things. He made me feel as if I had touched a snake. And then Mary came in."

"What is she like, Marjorie?" cried the Lewis girls. "She must be very queer living in that awful place."

"Do you think she is afraid of that dreadful old man?" Dolly asked in a hushed whisper, as if the being so described might be somewhere within hearing.

Marjorie answered both questions together.

"She seemed a good deal like a wooden doll, and

a doll wouldn't show fear," declared Marjorie; "but I'm sure she is afraid. She's coming to-morrow, though, and you'll see!"

"Oh, Marjorie!" cried the girls.

"You don't mean that she's coming here, to Mayfair?" broke from Jack.

"She's coming to our house, not to the field," answered Marjorie. "You do ask stupid questions sometimes, Jack, though you are in philosophy. Is that what you call your class?"

"You wouldn't understand if I told you," retorted Jack; "girls never learn any of those things."

"Well, they don't want to, anyway," snapped Marjorie.

"Do stop scrapping with Jack and get on with your story, Marjorie," interposed Dick.

"There's not much more to tell. Mother says Mary has had a lonely, miserable life. So you must all be nice to her. Some of your fine college airs will do for her, Jack, because she seems almost grown-up."

Jack reddened, catching Marie Lewis' eye.

"I'm glad to hear she has some sense," replied Jack; "we have too many kids around here as it is."

"I don't know whether she has sense or not!"

cried Marjorie. "All grown-up people are not sensible, any more than boys that pretend to be."

"Oh, do stop, Marjorie," urged Dick; "we want to hear you tell us about this girl. You're all right so long as you don't get sparring with Jack."

Madge, gratified by this bit of flattery from her cousin Dick, who was, perhaps, the most popular boy in Ironton, went on with her story:

"Mary Pemberton is to stay a week and we must do all we can to make her enjoy herself."

"We'll give her a good time!" cried Dick; "won't we, Jack?"

"The best we know how," agreed his chum, "but say, Marjorie, is the girl good-looking or jolly?"

"Oh, what do looks matter?" objected Dick. "And she can't be very jolly living in a hole like that with that old beast. Marjorie said she was a good deal like a doll."

"Well, we'll stir her up a bit," declared Jack. "What do you think, Miss Marie? Ironton's a pretty good place to have fun in?"

"I'm sure we like it," said Marie, smiling at him in her sweet-tempered way; "don't we, Florence?"

Florence assented somewhat hastily. She was busy questioning Madge on her own account.

"You didn't see anything strange or hear any queer sounds?" she asked.

"I certainly didn't hear anything at all except old Mr. Pemberton's voice and a few words from Mary, and I saw only what I told you—white-haired people with pale faces."

"But was the house different from other places—inside, I mean?"

"It was dark and rather dreary," Marjorie declared, letting her thoughts go back over the incidents of her short visit; "there was a very big hall, with a winding staircase like those we read of in books, and a great clock, but I think it was stopped; and the room we were in was dark and rather ghostly too."

"We must find out what kind of girl this Mary Pemberton really is," observed practical Dolly Martin, "before we can arrange any plans for her entertainment."

During Marjorie's description of the house Dolly had been in conference with the boys on this very subject, for each of them had been suggesting something which might be done to enliven the time of Mary's visit.

"You see," she went on, "she may like grown-up things and not care at all for out-door games. She

may not like Mayfair as well as we do, and she may not want to go climbing fences and getting her frocks torn in the woods."

"If she's such a muff as that," grumbled Luke Morris, "I wish she'd stay at home. It will be a week wasted and the summer vacation's short enough."

"Can't you tell us something about her?" inquired Jack.

"Just as much as you could tell what was behind a mask," Marjorie declared, proud of her distinction as story-teller.

"Well, it will be rather exciting to find out what is behind the mask," observed quiet Hugh Graham.

"I bet she won't be much fun!" pronounced Ned Wallace.

"She'll be a regular wet blanket, I know," added Luke, the grumbler.

"Shame, Luke," reproved Hugh, "it's mean to talk about a girl like that and especially before you know anything about her."

And Hugh flushed up to the roots of his sandy hair, as he spoke thus generously in defence of the absent.

"She may be as nice as anything," volunteered George Wallace, "because everything will be new to her."

"Whether she's fun or not," said Jack, the autocrat, "we've got to do the best we can to make her feel at home."

All agreed with this sentiment, and Marjorie, reverting to a previous question, declared thoughtfully:

"As for her looks, she's a good deal like the picture."

"What picture?" cried Jack. "If that isn't like a girl!"

"The picture that was in the room where we sat," Marjorie explained, ignoring Jack's insinuation. "It was Mary Pemberton's mother. But she was young, very young, wearing a ball-dress and carrying a bunch of roses in her hands."

"Does your mother remember that lady dressed like that and looking young?" asked Hugh, who had imagination.

"Yes, mother says she remembers the younger Mrs. Pemberton looking exactly like that at a ball in that very house."

"A ball at Hornby?" sniffed Dick. "Why, Marjorie, you're stuffing us."

"Ask mother, if you don't believe me!"

"Why, I thought it was always shut up, like a jail," added Luke Morris.

"I don't think it was, long ago," Marjorie declared.

"It's a wonder the old ogre lets the girl out now," Jack observed thoughtfully, plucking a dandelion to pieces.

"He called himself an ogre!" cried Marjorie, laughing at the recollection, "and he is like one."

"Every one says he keeps Miss Mary shut up," went on Jack, "and only lets her out into the garden about three or four times a year."

"Oh, come now, Jack, draw it mild!" objected Dick; "I guess he lets her out every day. But the garden's a rum sort of place—nothing except thistles and dog-weed grow there."

"I saw it more than once when I was a boy," began Jack.

"When you were a boy!" interrupted Marjorie, with a disdainful sniff.

"Yes, about your age, Marjorie," Jack went on, coolly, "do you remember, Dick?"

"Yes, you got up on my shoulder the first time we went to look over the wall, and you were so scared that you tumbled down and never gave me my turn to look over."

"Rot!" cried Jack, reddening. "I saw the old chap there and I didn't want him to begin jawing at me."

"You said it looked like a churchyard and gave you a chill!" persisted Dick.

"I was a youngster then, and I suppose I had fancies like other kids," explained Jack, "eh, Marjorie?"

"You hadn't any like me," cried Marjorie, quickly, "because you're altogether different. You're always thinking about yourself, for one thing."

"They say children and fools speak the truth," declared Dick, with a grin; "so, that's one for you, Jack, old fellow."

Jack didn't take a joke as well as some of the others, but there was nothing to be said, so he turned to find consolation in Marie's little lady-like sentences and Florence's good-fellowship.

And they all sat a while longer, as the lingering summer gloaming turned into night, and the stars began to shine out, with a mellow, golden radiance, in the deep blue overhead. They fell into a pleasant talk after that, from which all strife, even of jest, was banished, and into their minds came the dreams half-melancholy, half-joyous, which beset the path of youth. Shadows or premonitions of the events that are to make up each dawning life.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMING OF MARY PEMBERTON.

MARJORIE was dressed early the next afternoon and out upon the steps, awaiting the arrival of her visitor. It seemed to her that the day was very long and that the appointed hour would never come. The old man had mentioned four o'clock, and Marjorie knew that Mary would be punctual; but she was not sure whether the little girl would leave Hornby Hall at the time named or arrive at their house. She remembered, with a shiver, the old man's expression as he had declared that Mary was to return home again the same day and hour in the following week.

At length the time drew near when the expected visitor should arrive; Mary left Hornby Hall precisely at four o'clock and the half-hour which it took her to reach the Mortons' gate was to the impatient Marjorie the longest she had ever known.

She began even to fear that at the last moment Mr. Pemberton had kept his grandchild at home. At precisely half past four there was the sound of wheels coming rapidly up the road, a great cloud of dust, and Marjorie, with beating heart, saw such a carriage approaching as could have belonged only to the Pembertons. It was black and dingy, and suggested nothing so much as a prison van which Marjorie had once seen in a great city. Such as it was, it came on with sureness to the gate and, turning in, drove round the pleasant carriage drive, gay with its borders of flowers.

In this strange vehicle sat Mary Pemberton, pale and evidently bewildered. She was dressed in a dull brown frock; her hair was drawn tight back from her face in a most unyouthful fashion. But Marjorie clapped her hands for glee at the first sight of Mary, and ran down to open the carriage door. As a consequence of this impulsive movement, the old white-haired coachman remained motionless in his seat. Jerry came from the stable-yard and removed from the back of the carriage a large valise. Then the old coachman solemnly touched his hat and drove his lumbering van out the gate, leaving Mary bewildered at the foot of the steps. She stood still and looked about her—

looked at the flowers in the beds, and the broad, open field on the opposite side of the road, which served as a meeting-place for the small circle of boys and girls who were almost daily associates. They called the place Mayfair, for some unknown reason, and in Mayfair a certain number were even then assembled to watch this marvelous arrival.

Mary at length drew a deep breath as one long shut up in a dungeon might have done when restored to the light of day. Then she turned to Marjorie and spoke the strangest and yet the most natural words:

"I don't think I can ever go back there!"

"What will you do?" inquired Marjorie, awe-stricken but sympathetic. "They will come to get you."

A frightened look passed over Mary's face, as she said wearily:

"It is no use my saying I won't go back, for, of course, I shall be forced to go."

"You might hide somewhere," suggested Marjorie, doubtfully.

"Mrs. Miles would find me anywhere," declared Mary, turning still paler, as if the search had already begun.

"Who is Mrs. Miles?" Marjorie asked, breath-

lessly. She remembered how the old man had uttered that name.

"Ah, she is—" began Mary, checking herself abruptly with a shudder. "Perhaps she will hear even here."

Marjorie looked around her uneasily. It was quite like living in a story-book with evil enchanters or wicked fairies. Decidedly this strange girl had brought a new and mysterious atmosphere into Marjorie's happy but somewhat prosaic life. At that moment Mrs. Morton appeared upon the steps.

"Welcome, Mary, welcome, my dear, for your dead mother's sake and for your own."

As she kissed her, she added:

"Forget all your troubles for this one week, at least. Try not to remember that you have any."

"But after that?" inquired Mary, fixing a pair of solemn eyes upon Mrs. Morton.

"After that, who knows? Something may happen," cried Marjorie; "don't let us lose a minute of your time here. I have so much to show you and all the girls and boys want to know you and we're going to do all sorts of jolly things while you stay."

Marjorie was rather breathless from talking so

fast, but she held Mary's hand in hers and led her up to a pretty room, next to Marjorie's own. It had pink and white curtains, a chiffonier of the same colors, a long mirror in a bright frame, half a dozen pictures, and an atmosphere of brightness such as Mary had never breathed. She looked about her with much the same bewildered air as she had worn on alighting from the carriage. Her face twitched as if from pain, and the tears forced themselves from her eyes and fell down her cheeks to her ugly, dingy frock.

"We will never let you go back!" cried Marjorie impulsively. "You can just let Mr. Pemberton keep his old money and everything and if Mrs. Miles comes here—well, I'll get the boys to throw stones at her."

This was an awful threat but it made Mary laugh in the midst of her tears.

"You don't know Mrs. Miles!" she cried. A young maid came in to open the valise, which Jerry had brought up, and to know if there was anything else she could do. Pleasant bright faces everywhere. The gloom and darkness and dreariness all gone, and color, gay, bright color all around. Marjorie left Mary for a little while to give her an opportunity to change her clothes, bid-

ding her come down to the front steps just as soon as she was ready. Mary's sallow face grew red as she turned over her dingy frocks. She had not even so much as a ribbon with which to brighten them up. And yet she was only a girl, with a girl's natural love of pretty things. The feeling had begun to awaken within her the moment she had stepped out of the Pemberton carriage, in sight of the gay-colored flower beds. She sighed as she brushed out her long hair, which was glossy and abundant. She never thought of letting it fall loose about her, after the fashion of Marjorie's. She braided it up very tightly, as Mrs. Miles had instructed her to do, drawing it back from the temples. The eyes that looked out of the pale face were soft brown, like those of the picture, with yellow lights in them. The mouth was large and the nose somewhat out of proportion, defects which were also visible in the portrait.

Having completed her toilet, Mary went slowly downstairs. She paused on the broad landing to stare out from the cheerful window, shaded by bright-hued curtains and giving view upon a lovely garden, so unlike that dreary spot which the girl had known by that name. On the staircase walls hung pictures, before each of which Mary paused.

Everything here was a revelation to her. At last she reached the outer steps, where Marjorie sat impatiently waiting.

"Oh, ist that you, Mary, at last?" she cried. "Come and sit down a minute till we decide what we shall do first."

Mary seated herself beside Marjorie, but it did not take her very long to decide what she would prefer to do.

"I would like to go into the garden," she said, "if it's all the same to you."

This decision came partly from force of habit, for almost the only pleasure in the girl's dull life, hitherto, had been her daily walks in that dreary patch of ground dignified by the name of garden at Hornby Hall. But it also came from the glimpses which Mary had had from the stair window of delightful paths, winding amongst glowing masses of variegated color, which had made the Mortons' garden seem like some enchanted region.

"We'll go there first," cried Marjorie, "and, then, I want you to see my pony. You may ride him some day, if you're not afraid; and the rabbits and the new piggies in the farmyard behind the stables, and my own big dog, Nero. He's just splendid."

Talking thus, Marjorie reached the garden gate and presently the two found themselves amongst the glories of rose-laden bushes, pink and white and yellow and deep crimson. Carnations were there in clustering masses, and tulips made rich spots of color, while lilies of the valley, hyacinths, heliotrope, and sweet pea, vied with each other in perfuming the atmosphere. A garden, indeed, is a wonderful place even to the ordinary observer, but to this child it was as a new Eden, the dawning of a new world.

"Pick as many flowers as you like," Marjorie exclaimed, "for the gardener says it's better for the bushes."

"Pick them?" echoed Mary in amazement. "Do you mean that I can pluck them off the bushes?"

She had not thought it possible to so much as touch one of these radiant objects. At Hornby it had been a crime to pick so much as a leaf from a tree. Once Mrs. Miles had come up suddenly behind the girl and had bent her fingers backward till she screamed with pain, for the simple offence of touching the soft, green leaves of a young tree. The tree had shot up unaccountably, as is sometimes the case, and had seemed to thrive in the unpromising soil. Mary had loved it as if it were

a living thing. But after that occurrence Mrs. Miles caused the tree to be uprooted, and the tender green of the leaves met the tired eyes no more.

"I think I will take one of these," Mary ventured, pointing to a dark red rose with heart of fire. The vivid coloring charmed her.

"Take a lot, as many as you like!" cried Marjorie. "And wait, I'm going to fasten a bunch of them in your frock. They will look so well against the brown."

Mary blushed, partly with mortification at the plain appearance of her dress, partly with pleasure at Marjorie's idea, and she readily submitted to be decorated by her new friend with some of the choicest of the red roses.

"I would like to let down your hair," went on Marjorie, emboldened by the success of her first experiment; "oh, may I, please? it is such a pretty color. It will show so much better if I shake it out loose."

Mary drew back, at first, in terror. What if Mrs. Miles should see her with loosened hair and roses at her throat? But she remembered presently that it was scarcely possible for Mrs. Miles to see her in the Mortons' garden, and she gave a sigh of relief.

"You are free here and can do as you please," urged Marjorie. Mary hesitated for only another minute; then she sat down upon a garden bench and let Marjorie unfasten her hair. Down it came rippling and shimmering over the brown frock, amid many exclamations of delight from Marjorie.

"Oh, you are such a dear, and you do look so pretty now," cried the impulsive girl.

"Pretty, oh, no!" objected Mary.

"Yes, you do look pretty, doesn't she, papa?" repeated Marjorie, appealing suddenly to a man who just then came toward the two girls.

Mary started to her feet in terror, while the man stood looking. She had not yet got over the habit of being terrified.

"Eh, what?" said the newcomer, advancing nearer. "What did you say, Marjorie, and who is this?"

Before Marjorie could say a word he answered his own question.

"Bless my soul, I need not ask. Come and give me a kiss, Mary; your mother was my dearest cousin."

"Cousin!" cried Marjorie, astonished; "I never, never knew Mary was a relation of ours."

"Yes, she is," declared Mr. Morton, "and, egad, how the years do pass. I saw you a toddling

infant and now you are just Bessie over again, eyes and hair and all." He mentally added: "Only not so pretty." For Bessie, though no beauty in reality, had been beautiful in the eyes of her boy cousin, who had dearly loved her.

"And you have come to make a long stay, I hope."

"Just a week, sir," Mary answered. Though not shy, she was more timid with Mr. Morton than with either Marjorie or her mother.

"A week, and then to go back to Hornby?" Mr. Morton exclaimed. "We must see if we can not get a commutation of sentence."

He laughed and presently added:

"We must really turn the week into a month, if any magic can do it. Meanwhile, Marjorie, take good care of my little cousin. Let her have all the amusement she wants, and, of course, she must have some pocket-money."

Mary blushed. She had never handled a penny in her life.

"Old men like your grandfather forget they were ever young," went on Mr. Morton, "but I know what it is to be left short of funds. So, my dear, you'll have to let Cousin Harry play fairy godfather, or he won't be pleased at all."

So saying, Mr. Morton took from his pocket a couple of bills and forced them into the girl's hand.

"You may want them in some of the frolics which Marjorie is going to get up," he observed; "money always helps along the fun."

He stood thoughtfully a moment with his hands in his pockets, then suddenly roused himself from the reverie to say:

"I remember, as if it were yesterday, when your grandmother, dear old soul, tipped me when I went to spend my Christmas at Hornby. Dear me! Dear me!"

As Mr. Morton spoke, the selfsame thing happened as before in the room upstairs. The big tears streamed down Mary's cheeks, falling upon her dull frock.

"What, you don't mind, I hope!" cried Mr. Morton, in consternation. "And you will keep the bills?"

"Oh, no, I don't mind," cried Mary; "it isn't that at all. I will keep the money, because I know you want me to do that and I will be happy for this week, at least."

"That's right," said Mr. Morton, a little uneasy at this outburst, "and I'm to be your banker if you want any girl's fixings."

As Mr. Morton passed on, Mary stood fingering the bills and smiling softly after the retreating figure:

"You ought to be very happy, living with people like that," she said to Marjorie.

"So I am," agreed Marjorie, "except when I get cross sometimes and imagine that the world's all upside down."

CHAPTER V.

MARY IS INTRODUCED TO MAYFAIR.

THERE was intense curiosity amongst the Mayfair boys and girls, as they called themselves, to see the new arrival. Any one from Hornby was a novelty not to be ignored and Ironton, like other villages, was ever on the lookout for anything new. So that many of the folk who made up its population found they had business in the direction of the Morton house that evening and passed there in groups, keeping sharp eyes open for a glimpse of the girl who had been kept so many years a virtual prisoner at Hornby. Why, even the ticket-of-leave man who had passed through the village a few days before was not a greater curiosity, and every boy had managed to interview him and every girl had peeped at him from secure places, while

their elders had stared curiously at the poor wretch.

Popular sentiment being thus aroused in that rustic corner of the world, it is little wonder that the frequenters of Mayfair, which was the private property of the Mortons and could not be trespassed upon, felt themselves privileged indeed, and awaited with eager anticipation the coming amongst them of the newly released.

While they waited, Jack and Dick, who were older and had heard more of the local gossip, entertained the others and especially the Lewis girls, who were newcomers, by rehearsing all the old tales, some of them blood-curdling and, of course, many false, which were told of Hornby Hall. So that it was as well the sun was shining and the birds singing on that lovely afternoon of Mary's coming, or there would have been shivers and shakes amongst the girls, and possibly some of the boys would have run home a little more swiftly than usually and declined to linger in lonely spots.

"I guess Jack and I were pretty thoroughly scared one night when we went around there," honest Dick declared, winding up a thrilling narrative: "I tell you, we cut out and ran for it."

"But I thought boys were never afraid," put in Marie Lewis sweetly, "I thought it was only girls."

"Not all girls!" corrected Dick. "Marjorie is as plucky as any boy. It would be pretty hard to frighten her, but I guess even she would be afraid at Hornby."

"It wasn't exactly that we were afraid," Jack explained; "it was just a sort of nervous feeling that came over us near that old rookery. There's such lots of stories about the place. Some say it's haunted, others that there was a murder committed there long ago."

"A murder!" cried Marie Lewis. "How perfectly dreadful!"

"Hush!" whispered Dick, "they're coming."

Jack's eager eyes turned upon the two figures just coming forth from the Mortons' gate. His own curiosity overcame his desire still further to interest and terrify the city girl beside him. For her smart clothes and young lady airs appealed to him more than to any other boy in Ironton. He got to his feet with his companions, who were all assembled now. All eyes were turned upon the sallow face and slender figure of Mary Pemberton.

"Not so bad-looking after all," Dick whispered.

The crimson roses and the excitement had given color to the dark face and the eyes were glowing, too, with the influence of the new, happy life around her.

"She looks somewhat different from what I expected," replied Jack in the same low voice, "and from—the rest of the girls."

He spoke slowly, meditatively, and Mary Pemberton having drawn near caught the boy's gaze fixed upon her. She did not smile, but regarded him gravely and silently. Her eyes travelled from him to Dicky Dalton, who felt a sudden chivalrous pity for the poor maiden escaped for this brief holiday from the ogre. She next fixed her glance of quiet scrutiny upon Hugh Graham, who flushed uncomfortably under it, and upon the three other boys, who stood leaning over one another's shoulders to get a good look at her. Marjorie, leading her forward, introduced her first to the girls, who all greeted her effusively, offering her a seat amongst them on the bench and holding her hand, each in turn, while warm-hearted Dollie Martin put an arm about her. Then it came the turn of the boys to be severally presented to her. She again observed them with a gaze of deliberate observation. Then she turned to Marjorie, with a

laugh which was low and tremulous, for laughter was new to her though she had inherited from her mother a keen sense of humor.

"I never saw a boy before," she remarked, "and they certainly are odd-looking!"

The boys looked at one another uncomfortably. Even Jack was disconcerted and the others shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. It was so singular, this being inspected by a creature who had never seen a boy before.

"You," she said, addressing Jack, "are quite tall, almost a man."

This speech tickled Dick so much that he nearly choked in trying not to laugh aloud. He regained his composure only by a mighty effort which left him red in the face.

"I wonder," Mary said next, with the same calm air of one desiring information, "why boys should wear anything so very tight and high around their necks. It must be very uncomfortable, especially in hot weather."

Her remark was directed with special reference to Jack, who looked wrathfully around, and seeing Dick convulsed with laughter managed to give him a kick. Marjorie clapped her hands in delight and laughed outright.

"Oh, Mary!" she cried, "Jack is awfully proud of his high collar; he thinks it makes him a man."

"Do you?" inquired Mary, fixing her grave eyes steadily upon Jack. She had no thought of turning him into ridicule, and when the boy's keen glance had told him that such was the case, he answered her with the air of good-humored patronage he always used to girls:

"Marjorie will always have her joke. You mustn't mind her. She's such a kid."

"A kid?" Mary repeated, looking around helplessly at Marjorie.

The boys, with the exception of Jack, were all laughing by this time and engaged in various expedients to conceal the fact. They had never heard any one talk like this girl before and it struck them as so very droll that they simply could not restrain their merriment.

"Mary doesn't know any slang," said Marjorie; "I don't suppose she knows even what slang is."

"I know hardly anything," said poor Mary, looking piteously round upon the group, and again the tears came from her eyes and rolled down her cheeks, "I have lived so differently from any one of you."

Let it be set down to the credit of the Mayfair

boys and girls that the smiles vanished from their faces. Every boy present was, moreover, ready from that moment to be her champion and, as they expressed it, "to punch any fellow's head that had a word to say against her."

"Never mind, Mary," spoke out Dick, "we can soon tell you whatever you want to know and we're all going to have a jolly time together this week, anyway."

Mary's face brightened.

"Everything here is lovely and I know I shall like every one of you," she said, more impulsively than one would have supposed she could have spoken. "If only you knew what it is to see the world for the first time."

This was a view of the case which had not before presented itself, and some of those present began to regard Mary with a new interest, not untinged with envy. It is to be regretted, too, that Miss Marie Lewis was conscious of a slight resentment at being thrust into the background, whereas she had for some weeks enjoyed the proud position of a new arrival fresh from the city, dressed in lovely clothes, and a very pretty little girl besides, with the most correct boarding-school manners.

"It is rather nice to feel as though you saw

everything for the first time," remarked Dollie Martin, who sat close beside Mary and already felt very kindly toward her. "You see most of us are rather tired of everything about Ironton."

"But, imagine, I had never seen a girl till Marjorie came the other day. And I do think they are so nice, much prettier than boys."

She said this in a low voice, not meant for the boys' ears, but gleeful Marjorie at once announced it aloud with a flourish of trumpets. The boys were, however, very tolerant about it and Mary did not sink at all in their good graces because of her preference for girls.

"If only I hadn't to go back!" Mary said with a sudden pang at the recollection that all this pleasant warmth and light and cheerful companionship would soon disappear as if by magic.

"Boys," cried Marjorie, "if only we could invent a plan to keep Mary here always."

"Oh, look here, you," said Jack, "you'll get into trouble. They've the law and Miss Pemberton's natural guardians."

"Unnatural, you mean!" exclaimed impetuous Marjorie.

"Hush!" whispered Dollie Martin, for she saw a flush rising to Mary's cheek.

"Of course," went on Mary, "what I mean is it's very lonely at the Hall, with only my grandfather, who is old, and there is Mrs. Miles—"

She had spoken with a curious dignity which sat so well upon this grave young girl with the air of unusual distinction about her, even in her plain and homely garb, which dwarfed Marie Lewis' prettiness into insignificance and made even Marjorie seem hoydenish and unformed. But when she came to the name of Mrs. Miles she stopped, growing pale and casting a troubled look about her.

"Who is Mrs. Miles? Oh, do tell us about her?" cried the girls, while the boys likewise drew near, with an expressive movement of eager interest.

"Oh, she's just Mrs. Miles. No one could describe her. She's hateful and terrible. She sees everything, even in the night. I believe she is like a cat and can see in the dark. She hears the smallest sound and comes creeping, creeping, catching you when you least expect it and hurting you in whatever way she can."

The children listened with fascinated interest, their eyes growing rounder and wider. It was like some tale of witches that had charmed or terrified their childhood. Though Mary thus discoursed freely of Mrs. Miles, she felt an odd and newly

awakened sense of loyalty, which impelled her to say nothing against her grandfather, who terrified her indeed almost as much as did this formidable woman and was the power behind Mrs. Miles, inspiring her acts or, at least, sanctioning them.

"I wish you all could see her and hear her speak and feel her bony fingers catching you, when you don't even know she's near," went on Mary.

"I just wish we could catch her!" cried Hugh Graham, speaking out suddenly, his fair face aglow with indignation. "I should just like to come up behind her when she had seized you."

"That would be jolly," said Dick; "I should like to see her forced to dance a witch's dance."

"Or ducked in a horse pond, as they used to do with witches," added Jack.

"Oh, wouldn't it be fun!" cried the others.

But Marjorie here made a diversion.

"I don't think it's good for you, Mary, to be thinking so much of that awful woman," she said. "It would be far better to play while you are here and enjoy every moment of the time. Let's play Hide and Seek."

"Yes, and make believe Mrs. Miles is after each one of us," suggested Luke Morris.

"It wouldn't be much fun if she were," said Ned

Wallace, "but it will give a creepy feeling to the game."

"I know I shall shriek if any one catches me," Marie Lewis declared; "I shall fancy it is she."

"Let two or three of us hide together," Dolly said; "then we can't get nervous. There, Dick hat to find the rest of us. Come on, Mary!"

The girls acted upon Dolly's suggestion, two or three of them grouping together in the various places of hiding they selected and where Dick found them all in good season and came upon them with a terrific whoop to represent Mrs. Miles.

So that all the girls did shriek lustily, except Mary, who was accustomed to the very useful habit of self-repression. Jack did not join in the game. He thought it undignified and that he was getting too big for such frolics. He took a book out of his pocket and began ostentatiously to read, but in spite of himself his eager eyes would follow every movement of that jovial game in which he had been wont to join with gusto.

And so came Mary's first visit to Mayfair to an end, leaving her much exhilarated by the air and exercise and the society of those of her own age.

"I love Mayfair," she said; "I think it is so nice for you all to have this big place to run in."

"Mother says we're all getting to be too big for those games, and that very soon we'll have to be quite staid and dignified," Marjorie confided to her new friend. "Won't it be tiresome?"

"Indeed it will," agreed Mary heartily; "I know what that is, because I always have to be as quiet as if I were an old woman."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. AND MRS. MORTON RECALL THE PAST.

Now while Mary was being introduced to her young friends in Mayfair, Mr. Morton sat smoking upon the veranda. His wife was near, enjoying the beauty of the summer's evening and smiling now and then at the sounds of merriment which reached her from the field opposite. As they sat thus their talk turned naturally upon Mary.

"There never was a child more to be pitied!" Mrs. Morton declared emphatically.

"I guess you're about right there, Lucy," assented Mr. Morton; "old Pemberton always did make my flesh creep, even as long ago as my college days. And yet he was very different then from what he is now."

Mr. Morton, becoming reminiscent, blew out a cloud of smoke, under cover of which he let his thoughts wander back to the days when he had

been a fresh-cheeked, fair-haired youth, coming out of college for his vacation. Now he was stout and middle-aged, his fresh cheeks had become florid and his hair had a hint of gray about the temples, but he liked to recall the past, as, indeed, all the world does.

"Harry," asked his wife, after the pause had lenghtened as such pauses do between members of the same family, "do you believe these stories that are told?"

"Well," said Mr. Morton, "I can't say that I believe all of them. In a country place like this there is sure to be exaggeration. But some of them we know to be true and we can guess at others."

He dropped his voice and looked about him cautiously as he spoke.

"Of course," said Mrs. Morton, "if we hadn't known some of them to be true, there would never have been a break between the families. For instance, we know or suspect how Bessie was treated after her husband's death and how fiercely bitter Mr. Pemberton was against her."

"Poor Bessie!" Henry Morton murmured, knocking the ashes off his cigar. From the field beyond came the babel of merry voices, which broke upon the summer dusk, with the monotonous

drone of the katydids and the chirp of a belated bird.

"Wasn't that a dreadful evening, when we first found out?" Mrs. Morton said, with a tremor in her voice and a blanching of her cheek. "Do you remember, as we reached the door what a fearful storm came up? There was a yellow glare in the sky and a moaning wind howling about the house. The door was thrown open and the old man himself stood upon the threshold. I often think of his ghastly face and burning eyes as he said: 'Come in, till I show you a brave sight—my only son lying dead.' And we went in and looked at poor Philip lying in his coffin, smiling and handsome as ever. It was such a shock. I had spoken to him only the night before."

"By George, Lucy, I shall never forget that night!" cried Harry Morton. "It was sickening."

"And when he told us—the rest," added Mrs. Morton.

"Hush!" said her husband, "don't mention it, even here."

"How little poor Philip knew the night before, when I met him on the staircase. It made me shudder to look at it the other day. He stopped just on the turn of the stairs to speak to me and

he was jesting about everything, telling about all the rows he had had with his father all about nothing, and about his debts and the rest of it. Only once he was grave, and I have often told you before what he said then."

"Yes, I remember," her husband said, "it was about Mary."

"He said, 'If anything should happen me, my poor little girl is to go to Harry. I have left it in my will.' Then I suggested a possible objection to this from Bessie. 'Bessie knows,' he said, 'Bessie will be far more free to do what she pleases with the little one once it is away from Hornby.'

"Just at that moment old Mr. Pemberton appeared at the top of the stairs, but a few paces away. I do not know whether he had heard what we said, but his face was very stern. Then Philip whispered something into my ear, of which I caught only these words, 'the long barn,' and I, bowing to old Mr. Pemberton, called back good night to Philip and went down to where the carriage was waiting at the door."

Husband and wife were silent, until Mr. Morton said:

"I wonder if it was then and there the quarrel took place."

"I fear so," said his wife, shuddering, "though we never could get at the details."

"It was a shocking thing," Mr. Morton said, holding his cigar suspended and unheeding the fact that it had gone out.

"Philip's words have always been in my mind," Mrs. Morton said, "and I often seem to hear them even in my sleep. It is a great reproach to me, that we have never done anything, especially after all that followed, when Bessie was taken and the child left alone."

"But, you see, that will of poor Phil Pemberton's never turned up," Harry observed, "so we are powerless."

"I am confident that will exists, if only it could be found," Mrs. Morton declared.

"Its existence is more than doubtful," Mr. Morton argued; "it would probably have been destroyed, even if Phil ever made it."

"I am sure he made it," Mrs. Morton persisted, "his look and tone were so solemn, and I do not think it has been destroyed. For even if the grandfather is as bad as people say, he would be afraid that the original of such a document might be preserved in some law office and turn up unexpectedly at any time to cause a scandal. He

would more likely content himself with hiding it away, saying that its existence had been unsuspected till it was called for."

"Well reasoned out, little woman," said Harry admiringly, "but it doesn't make things much better for Mary or for us."

"Harry, I believe that will might be discovered by diligent search."

"But who is to search? Fancy any one invading Hornby and looking for anything in the teeth of old Pemberton and that Argus-eyed old witch he keeps to do detective duty."

"Still," said Mrs. Morton, "it seems very dreadful to think of this child's going back to that house. My visit there the other day only confirmed the fearful impressions I had carried away on that night long ago. I felt that we should not have left Bessie's child there all these years without even an effort to protect, to befriend her. Oh, I can't talk of it, Harry. I can't sit still and think of it. I am full of self-reproach."

Mr. Morton looked grave.

"My dear," he said, "you are unjust to yourself and to me. It was a very delicate matter to interfere in. Then we were abroad for some time. You were ill after that, and even now I fail to see what

we can do. Old Pemberton is not to be thwarted and he has the legal advantage on his side."

"Harry," whispered the wife, bending toward her husband so that her voice could reach him alone, "I do not think he would if all were known."

Harry looked startled.

"Lucy," he cried, "do you mean—? But that is impossible. Think of the scandal, the publicity. My, the Pembertons and the Mortons would be a nine days' wonder in Ironton and far beyond. There is talk enough already."

"But have we the right to sacrifice this child to any idea of that sort?" Mrs. Morton inquired.

Mr. Morton pushed back his chair, with a movement of impatience.

"What are you driving at, Lucy?" he said. "You women are so reckless of consequences, and this child has come to no harm so far. The old man can't live forever. By your own showing, he looked the other day as if he couldn't hang on much longer, and then I will be Mary's guardian and all will come right without any raking up of dead ashes."

Mrs. Morton sighed, saying presently in a subdued tone, for Harry, like other men, had his moments when it is not safe to venture too far in argument:

"Could you not hold out some threat which would make him give Mary up?"

Harry Morton laughed scornfully.

"Threats, indeed. I thought you knew old Pemberton better than that. And besides, where are the witnesses, that woman who used to be about there —I forget her name—not Miles, but the other?"

"Hester Primrose," suggested Mrs. Morton.

"Well, she's gone and so is the Irishman, who used to work in the garden. He was a fine fellow and I never believed the trumped-up charge against him."

"Poor Malachy O'Rourke! I remember him well," exclaimed Mrs. Morton—"a cheerful fellow, full of kindliness and good will, with a song always on his lips. How different everything was in those days!"

There was a long pause; then Mrs. Morton spoke, slowly and deliberately. She was a brave and resolute little woman, but she knew that her husband was of the easy-going and very practical stamp. So she hesitated to put her idea into words.

"If that will is non-existent, or if there is no hope of getting it—" she began.

"Well, what then?" inquired her husband, looking at her with an indulgent smile. He had a high

opinion of her qualities, mental and moral. She was so honest, so full of sterling rectitude and of faith, so exact in her religious duties, hence a model wife and mother, training up Madge in her own footsteps.

"I should be in favor of keeping the child here," she said firmly, "and of letting Mr. Pemberton take what steps he will."

"Lucy!" cried Mr. Morton aghast, " you know you would never do that!"

"I know that I can not allow that child to go back and be subjected, as I fear she has been, to ill usage or, at all events, to dreariness unspeakable and the terrors of that dreadful Hall. Now that I know her, the eyes so like Bessie's would haunt me, and we are morally certain that both her father and mother wished her to be with us."

Mr. Morton whistled, a long, astonished whistle.

"By George!" he muttered, staring into the soft darkness of the summer's evening, which began to overspread all the landscape. For he was, as he said himself, dumbfounded at this idea of his wife's.

Mrs. Morton drew near.

"You know we can't do it," she declared. "You are Bessie's cousin. You were her friend and boy champion long before you knew me."

"Yes!" Harry Morton remembered only too well, and out of the gathering dusk seemed to come the slender figure, the appealing eyes, the ringing laugh of that long dead Bessie. He saw her almost with physical sight in the intensity of his new emotions. He was not an imaginative man, but eminently practical, disposed to let things take their course, to have no quarrel with his neighbors. He was, indeed, a typical American of a certain kind, with whom the world had gone well, who had family traditions, the feeling of caste, and a strong sense of the reserve which should enshroud family affairs.

And here he was called upon to do a most unusual thing, to engage in an extraordinary squabble, in the course of which much that was undesirable might be brought to light. Yet here was his wife resolute, and there was Bessie appealing to him out of the past to protect her child, and then, the girl herself. He remembered suddenly how she had looked when he gave her the money.

"We can't let her go back in that dismal prison van to worse than solitary confinement," urged Mrs. Morton, returning to the attack. "Why, even this very visit the old wretch—but, there, I mustn't call names—designed as a new torment. He said

Mary would the better understand what discipline meant and how different his hateful, old Hornby Hall was from other places, after she had been away."

Henry Morton looked very grave.

"I will think it all over, Lucy," he decided, "but we must move very carefully. It is possible, as you say, that old man Pemberton will not care to go to law, especially if he knows anything about that will. He has such a lot of skeletons about the place that he may not care to set them all loose. Not a word, though, to Marjorie or the girl herself. Here they come, by the way."

The sound of merry voices preceded the boys and girls as they came streaming out of the field which they had dignified by the name of Mayfair. Their gay talk and laughter seemed like a commentary on the strange conversation which had taken place between husband and wife. They heard Mary's name uttered by one after another of the pleasant young voices. It was plain that each vied with the other in pleasing the forlorn girl and making her one of themselves. Somehow, these things went to the heart of the kindly pair who looked out upon the swarm of young figures, dimly seen in the dusk.

"You hear?" said Mrs. Morton. "She has begun to live. We can't send her back to living death."

"By George, you're right. Something must be done. We'll keep her, if there were twenty old men to fight."

CHAPTER VII.

MR. MORTON FORMS A PLAN.

MARJORIE and Mary bade the others good-night at the gate and came up the steps onto the veranda. It seemed already as if the two girls had known each other all their life. Marjorie in her impulsive way and Mary in staid, sober fashion found a mutual pleasure in each other's society.

"She is like her mother," remarked Mr. Morton to his wife, as he watched the straight, slender figure coming through the dusk.

"In that light she is her very image," Mrs. Morton agreed, "though Bessie was better-looking."

The elders then fell silent, listening amiably to the talk of the two girls and putting in an occasional word. A hay-cart drive had been planned for the next day and Marjorie was describing the glories of that particular form of merrymaking to Mary, who was, of course, totally ignorant of all such things.

"We will drive out in a great big cart with lots of hay on it, to the milestone farm."

"What is that?" Mary asked.

"Oh, a big farmhouse opposite the fifth milestone from here. We will have berries and cream there, picking the berries ourselves from the beds, and then we can roam round the farm awhile and come back just at sunset, when the air will be lovely."

The two were so interested as they sat together side by side that Mr. and Mrs. Morton thought themselves perfectly free to converse without fear of being overheard, and Mr. Morton asked his wife suddenly:

"Lucy, what do you think Phil Pemberton meant when he mentioned the 'long barn'?"

"The long barn?" cried Mary Pemberton, turning in her strange, unchildlike way to join in the conversation, much to the surprise of both husband and wife. For the girl's quick ear had caught the familiar word and she seemed eager to tell all she knew about the subject under discussion.

"Oh, I used to hear so much about the long barn. Grandfather and Mrs. Miles often talked about it, and I know that Mrs. Miles used to go out there night after night with a lantern. I didn't think grandfather knew that, but I saw her often, creep-

ing out, when every one was asleep, just like a ghost. Once she caught me watching her from the window."

No one inquired what had followed upon that discovery, but the expression of terror which suddenly came into the child's face showed that the experience had been a fearful one. And it was this look of Mary's which caused Marjorie to exclaim:

"I don't think Mrs. Miles is real. I think she must be just some witch or fairy that sprang out of the ground to torment people."

Marjorie's father and mother were meanwhile exchanging glances.

"What do you think the woman was looking for in the long barn?" Mr. Morton asked, with apparent carelessness.

"I think, perhaps, she has been looking lately for a paper," Mary answered, thoughtfully, "for I heard her saying to grandpapa that there was not a scrap of paper in the whole place. But I think Mrs. Miles keeps a lot of things out there, because she goes there so often, and grandfather can't go to see what she has and none of the servants dares."

Mary paused and her listeners waited, Marjorie, with breathless awe, looking at her friend with

interest, as at one who had known strange experiences.

"I saw the door open once and I peeped in, and another time when I was a little, little girl I heard a voice, a fearful voice, crying and groaning. I ran away quick. I thought it was something bad."

"Was that Mrs. Miles' voice?" asked Mrs. Morton.

"No, oh no, it was not like hers at all."

"That is curious," commented Mr. Morton, gravely. "And you say that is some time ago?"

"Yes, when I was a child."

Mr. and Mrs. Morton smiled.

"That was not so very long ago," Mrs. Morton said.

"It was the year my father and mother died."

There was silence after this; husband and wife were reflecting deeply. Nero, roused in his kennel by some unwonted noise, rose and bayed his deep-mouthed warning; then lay down again, content that he had done his best. The elders as well as the two children were thinking of the same thing, the singular being who with a certain, cold malignity seemed to reign over the destinies of Hornby Hall. She was flesh and blood, indeed, despite

Marjorie's surmise, but every atom of human feeling save, perhaps, that of hatred had been worn away by her long years of service in that atmosphere of gloom and dreariness. She had come there a young girl, and had remained under the stern tutelage of the autocrat who ruled there, to become as Mary had described her, merely Mrs. Miles. Every one of the years, aided by a series of extraordinary events, had taken away some of her lightheartedness, if ever she had been lighthearted, some of her natural feeling, if ever she had possessed any. In that region of cold unbelief she had lost all faith in the supernatural, and with it all color and warmth and the joy of living.

At her master's bidding and because, with her dangerous knowledge, he wanted to bind her to his service, she had married the butler, who had grown gray in the service of the Pembertons and was wholly devoted to them. After a few joyless years, in which he had been a mere cipher, an automaton moving at the bidding of his iron-willed master and still more implacable wife, he died, unmourned by the woman who had borne his name and whom he had married to please his master. She had remained after that, trusted by the autocrat as he trusted no other human creature, a part of

all the dark traditions of Hornby Hall, as immovable as one of its walls.

"Do you know!" said Mary, "when she told grandfather that there was not a scrap of paper in the barn, I don't think she told the truth, because she muttered to herself afterward that the thing must be there somewhere and that if only she could climb up or get a suitable ladder she would find it. The ladder in the granary had been burned. I heard her say these things when she thought I was asleep."

"By George!" cried Mr. Morton in great excitement. "I know the long barn well and I can judge the place she wants to get at. It's a loft over one end of it. We boys used to try long ago to climb to it and once Phil actually did get up. He thought it a great feat and used to boast of it for a long time after. Phil knew the spot, of course, and would be sure to think of it if he wanted to hide anything."

All this was Greek to Mary, though she had the premature shrewdness and powers of observation engendered by her training. Her attention, too, was distracted by Madge's dog, the great Mt. St. Bernard, who had come slowly round the side of the house and approached the steps with a joyful

wag of his huge tail at sight of his young mistress. Mr. and Mrs. Morton, however, continued to discuss the subject between themselves.

"But why should the woman Miles wish to deceive the old man?" Mr. Morton inquired, doubtfully.

"I think the reason is very plain," said Mrs. Morton; "she wanted to keep this secret as a power in her own hands, to be used under certain circumstances. That is, if she has been able to find the will."

"She certainly couldn't climb up to the loft," Mr. Morton said with a laugh, "but she may have had other means of reaching it, though the child heard her bemoaning the loss of a ladder. Will you try to remember," he asked of Mary, breaking in upon her talk with Marjorie, "every word the old woman said when she was speaking of the long barn."

"I think, sir, I told you all I remember," answered Mary. "That night that I heard her speaking about the ladder and being unable to climb she dropped hot wax from her candle on my face to see if I was asleep. I had to pretend I was and to wake up suddenly. The wax burned me so that my cheek was quite sore for a long time."

"Poor child!" murmured Mrs. Morton.

"She told me to tell grandfather," Mary went on, "that I had been stung by a bee, if he noticed the spot. But I couldn't, because my own dear mother told me always to tell the truth. So she made me sleep in the attic that night, where the bats are; she knew I was afraid of bats. She told grandfather that I had been stung and he said not to let me come near him till my cheek was well. I was glad of that and I think Mrs. Miles was, too, because she was afraid grandfather might ask questions. I had a fearful week. She made me do lots of disagreeable things."

"The woman ought to be shut up," Mr. Morton declared, indignantly.

"She is shut up in the worst of all jails," observed Mrs. Morton, with grim satisfaction at the thought, quite foreign to her usual good nature, "but the point is not to let Mary be shut up there again, if we can spirit her away somewhere."

"And go to jail ourselves, perhaps," Mr. Morton put in, but there was a new look on his face which bespoke a determination of some kind. After a while he said to Marjorie:

"Well, Marjorie, my pet, I have something in my mind which will be much more fun, for the boys at any rate, than any hay-cart drive. To-morrow's

Sunday, but early in the week I shall let them have an adventure."

"An adventure, papa!" exclaimed Marjorie. "Oh, what fun! but can't the girls be in it, too?"

"Not directly, I fear," said Mr. Morton, "but if all goes well they'll have some fine doings, too."

"I'm just dying of curiosity," said Marjorie, but Mary, who was accustomed to repress all emotions, said nothing. Indeed, when Mr. Morton had made mention of "early in the week," it had reminded her that by that time the greater part of her holiday would be over. And the reflection saddened while she trembled in anticipation of how Mrs. Miles would try to make up in cruelty for the pleasure she had had.

"She will torment me in a hundred ways," she thought, in her old-fashioned way, " but still it's worth it to have come here and to know them all. She can't stop my thoughts, nor make me forget. And when it is very lonely and dreary, I can bring in Marjorie and Dolly and the Lewises and Jack and Dick and Hugh and all the rest or I can play that I am in Mayfair. Of course, it will be only pretending, but it will be better than nothing."

Mrs. Morton here reminded Marjorie that as the morrow was Sunday it would be well for her

and Mary to go to bed somewhat earlier than usually. After the two children had gone, Mrs. Morton asked her husband:

"What is this plan you have in view for the boys?"

"Oh, just a frolic, dangerous enough to put spirit into it."

"What kind of frolic?"

Mr. Morton looked steadily at his wife before he replied:

"I am going to organize those boys who can be trusted into a searching party."

"A searching party?"

"Why, Lucy, you are usually quicker of wit than that," Mr. Morton exclaimed, somewhat impatiently.

"Well, I don't understand. What are they going to search for, and where?" said Mrs. Morton, regarding her husband with eyes which sought to read plainly the mystery in his face.

"What are they going to search for? Why, Phil Pemberton's will, of course, and where?"

A light broke over the wife's face.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I see! they are going to search in the long barn!"

Mr. Morton nodded.

"But won't it be dangerous?" his wife asked,

grown suddenly timorous. "We can't send other folks' sons into danger."

"Pooh! pooh!" cried Mr. Morton, "Mrs. Miles can't do much to half a dozen stirring lads, whatever she may do to orphan girls. Old Pemberton is helpless and the servants, old all of them, are not likely to be very brave or very alert."

"There might be firearms," Mrs. Morton suggested.

"Who is to use them? Hardly the woman, though I believe she's capable of anything. But it wouldn't be her cue, I fancy, to court the inquiry which the shooting of any one would cause. It will be easy to keep out of range of the old man, even though he finds out our presence on the premises, which I shall take every means to prevent. In fact, I hope to proceed so noiselessly and cautiously that our visit to the barn may never be discovered."

"I am afraid that will be scarcely possible with the Argus eyes you spoke of on the watch," said Mrs. Morton, rather faintly, for she began to realize that if there were danger in the attempt her husband would be in the thick of it. But Mr. Morton was already a boy again. He had got into the spirit of the adventure, besides being thoroughly aroused

on Mary's behalf, so that he was not to be deterred by obstacles.

"There is the law, of which you were so much afraid a while ago," went on his wife.

"A fig for the law!" said Mr. Morton. "If we get what we seek, we may snap our fingers at them and if we don't, why, it can be set down as a boys' frolic which can not be taken much more seriously than their habit of climbing up to look over the fence. It will be hard to identify any of the boys and, of course, they will all be pledged to secrecy. If all goes well, Mary is ours, once and forever."

CHAPTER VIII.

MARY'S FIRST TIME AT CHURCH.

THE following morning was Sunday, the quiet, wholesome Sunday of the country. The sunshine lying over the land was quiet and soothing, all labor was suspended, the cattle broused peaceful in the fields, shops were closed, and the village folks walked about in their best clothes, seeming somehow unfamiliar and unreal.

The Mortons were astir early, though they were going that day to the half past ten o'clock Mass at St. John's Church, which was a very little edifice, indeed, of which Ironton was very proud.

Mary Pemberton went with them, though she told the astonished Marjorie that she had never been in church before, except, perhaps, when her mother was alive and she was a very little girl. Mr. Pemberton did not believe in churchgoing and practised no form of religion himself.

The Mortons' pew was very near the front, and

Mary went up with the others, genuflecting mechanically because she saw her friend doing so and sitting or standing according as did the rest of the congregation. But she had no idea at all of what was going on. She did not know what the priest was doing at the altar nor why he should be dressed in that strange shining garment. The lights and flowers on the altar, the glow of the sanctuary lamp, the hush, the stillness, the whole atmosphere of the place enchanted her. To this girl, who had never to her recollection been inside of a church before, that High Mass was a revelation, wonderful, as though the gates of paradise had suddenly been left open and she had peeped into another and brighter world. She listened entranced to the music, the solemn and touching *Kyrie Eleison,* the gay, jubilant *Gloria,* the noble *Credo* and the tender *Agnus Dei.* They were strains as sweet to her as if choirs of angels had been singing, and the music of the organ to her unaccustomed ears was glorious. The picture over the altar, of John, the beloved disciple, leaning on his Master's bosom, fascinated her, though she did not know what it represented nor who either of the figures was.

The sermon was on charity: "And the greatest of these is charity." Mary listened, vaguely under-

standing what the preacher meant when he spoke of the love of God and of one's neighbor, but realizing that she had suddenly come into a world very different from that which was inclosed by the walls of Hornby Hall. Charity and peace and the glow which religion consciously or unconsciously gives to life were shut out from there as rigidly as bright colors and poetry and sentiment. It was not for many days, however, that Mary put into words all that was passing in her mind that memorable Sunday when she had first gone to church. She sat quiet beside Marjorie, watching her friend read attentively, with occasional glances at the altar, out of a pretty book, full of lace pictures. Once when Marjorie looked back in turn at Mary, it was suddenly borne in on her how a girl might feel who had never seen church or altar or any such things before.

All the boys and girls of Mayfair were there, with or without their respective families. Jack Holland was more resplendent than ever in a new suit and spotless, high collar, with a vivid blue tie and hair brushed till it shone. Beside him was, of course, Dick, and they were presently joined by Hugh, the Wallace boys, and Luke Morris. After Mass Marjorie and Mary very soon met the two Lewises,

Dollie Martin, and Kitty Hogan, and they all stopped for a chat. Marie Lewis looked very pretty in her white piqué costume, with the dearest blue sunshade, and Florence wore a very attractive pink chambray. Dollie looked sweet, as Marjorie said, though her face was plain and freckled, in a striped gingham, with a broad new straw hat. They looked very much like a bunch of flowers, as they stood together; though Marjorie was in her plainest frock to keep Mary in countenance and Kitty Hogan was in sober gray. It was pleasant to meet so many cheerful, smiling faces, Mary thought as she looked around. Nearly all the congregation of St. John's knew one another more or less, and Mrs. Morton had a word for nearly all the women, with whom she was associatel in confraternities or charitable work; and Mr. Morton exchanged a jest with John Tobin of the Riverside House, or shook the hand of old Jeremiah O'Meara the baker, and called out some remark upon the sermon to William McTeague of the general shop. In fact, he knew every one and every one knew him.

Mary was, though she did not realize it, quite a center of attraction. The village people lingered about to catch glimpses of her, and whispered to one another concerning her strange history.

"What would ould Mr. Pemberton say at all, at all, if he seen his granddaughter in a Catholic church?" remarked one. "He hates Catholics as he hates—well, I won't say ould Nick, for there's no tellin' how he stands in regard to him. But he hates them and ever and always did, even when he was a young man, as he was when I first came to Ironton."

"It's no wonder she's pale and yellow lookin' with the life she's led, poor thing," said Mrs. Mulvey, an Irishwoman, who washed for most of the families about; "why, beside Miss Marjorie there and the other young ladies, she looks ghastly, so she does. But she has a bright eye in her head and a purty smile, God bless her and take her out of the ould villain's clutches. For villain I call him."

While this byplay was going on, Jack and Dick had drawn near the group of girls, Jack being quite proud to be seen on easy terms with Miss Pemberton from Hornby.

"Suppose we all go for a walk in the woods this afternoon," suggested Jack. "Will you come, Marjorie and Miss Mary?"

"Oh, don't call her Miss!" cried Marjorie—"it sounds grown-up and horrid."

Mary looked at him with her steadfast brown eyes.

"I am just Mary Pemberton," she said.

"Well then, Mary, you will come and Marjorie and Miss Marie."

"I am not going to let you be formal with me either," interrupted Marie Lewis.

"Well, we're all friends together, then," said Jack, laughing, and coloring a little with pleasure, for the Lewises were very wealthy and very nice people and Jack, who was more of a snob than most boys of his age, felt the distinction of being thus admitted to intimacy. "And I suppose all the rest of you girls will come?"

"I will," answered Kitty Hogan, "that is, if you do not start too early. I have first to go with mother to see grandmamma."

"If you're in Mayfair at four o'clock," Jack decided, "it will do very well."

"We'll all be there!" agreed Marjorie. "It will be a splendid day for the woods."

"I'll get all the other boys," put in Dick. "Hugh has gone home. He was too shy to come over to a whole group of girls, and the rest seem to have cut and run, too."

"Tell them all to be sharp on time," commanded Jack; "we won't wait five minutes for any one."

"Listen to the dictator!" laughed Marjorie; "it

sounds like Napoleon to his army, or some of those things."

Jack vouchsafed the teasing girl only a scornful glance, as she explained:

"We want to have at least an hour and a half in the woods, and tea's early on Sunday."

"Almost every one in Ironton has tea early on Sunday," Marjorie told Mary, "because we Catholics go to Vespers and the Rosary on Sunday evening and the Protestants go to their church at seven."

"Oh," said Mary vaguely, adding after a pause, "I like going to church. I shall be glad to go back this evening. It's all wonderful and lovely."

Marjorie gave her friend a curious glance and then admitted freely:

"Sometimes I don't feel a bit like going to church. Still I go, and mother says feeling doesn't matter so long as we do what's right."

"I think I should always like to go to church," declared Mary. "You see I have never been there before."

"We never value so much what we have," agreed Marjorie. "Sometimes, though, I love to go to church, especially on festivals and the first Friday and all that."

"What has feeling to do with going to church?" pronounced the wise Jack, fresh from the lessons of his professor; "and it's only girls that talk about it."

"Hear the learned man," sniffed Marjorie; "as if I didn't know that I was just telling Mary a minute ago that feeling doesn't make any difference so long as people go."

"Stop scrapping, you two," interposed Dick; "if you begin that you'll spoil everything."

"I won't go near the kid at all!" declared Jack, loftily.

"Yes, you will, too," said Marjorie, "for you're dying to hear everything Mary says, and Mary will be with me."

Jack colored, for this was true—Mary being such a novelty as had not excited the somewhat dull village for many a day; and there was a certain distinction in knowing the long imprisoned orphan, who was also young lady of Hornby Hall, and an unusual interest in hearing her quaint utterances.

"Mary and I will stay with Dick and Dollie and Hugh," announced Marjorie, contradicting her previous declaration, "and you and the Wallaces and Luke can take charge of the Lewises and Kitty Hogan."

For by this time they had left the Lewises at their house, which was not very far from the church, and had bade Kitty Hogan "good-by" at a cross-road where she had to turn off.

"For shame, Marjorie," cried Dick; "that will be cliquing and Aunt Lucy doesn't allow that."

"That's true," assented Marjorie; "I said it to tease Jack. We'll just go any way at all, however it happens, only Mary and I will stay together."

"As if you were going to run the show," grumbled Jack.

"We can run away from you, anyway, if we like," retorted Marjorie. She did not dislike Jack, whom she had always known, but she couldn't resist teasing him whenever she got a chance.

"Don't you like the tall boy in the high collar?" asked Mary gravely as Jack moved scornfully aside. These grave questions of hers nearly upset Dicky's gravity every time she uttered them, and they puzzled Marjorie.

"Oh, I like him well enough," answered Marjorie," but he is so stuck up and thinks himself a great deal bigger than he is."

"He *is* big," observed Mary, looking after Jack, who was stalking ahead.

"Only sixteen!" declared Marjorie.

"And how old are you?"

"I'm fourteen, going on fifteen."

"You are nearly my age," remarked Mary, "at least I think so, but I'm not quite sure how old I am."

Dicky stared and then, turning away, began to kick the pebbles out of his path. This was the strangest girl he had ever met: she didn't know anything. Yet she was a good sort of girl, eager to join in every sport and be on the most friendly terms with all the boys and girls.

"Well," continued Mary, "the tall boy, Jack, seems a great deal older than you, Marjorie, and he seems to know a good deal and—"

"He has a higher collar than any other boy," interrupted Marjorie, laughing.

There was a gleam of humor in Mary's brown eyes as she regarded Jack's offending article of dress, just then being displayed in a rear view.

"Look here!" cried Dick, "Jack's my chum and he's a good fellow, and I wish you wouldn't be forever slanging him, Marjorie."

"Well, I'll try not to, Dick," said Marjorie in a friendly way, "for to-day anyway. I'll not say a word about his collar, or his new clothes, or his lordly ways. But he is enraging, Dick, and always makes me feel like teasing him."

Jack turned at the moment, sending his quick, flashing glance back at the group. Perhaps he guessed that he was under discussion, but in any case he quickened his pace, calling back with affected carelessness to his chum:

"I say, Dick, don't forget to see the Wallaces and Graham and Morris."

"All right," responded Dick, "I'll see them and tell them to be sharp on time. Mayfair at four o'clock."

CHAPTER IX.

MR. MORTON HOLDS A MEETING IN MAYFAIR.

On the Monday which followed that memorable Sunday, Mr. Morton called a meeting of the boys at Mayfair in the evening at 8 o'clock. Every one was punctual; each boy looking as solemn and important as if he were going to serve on a jury in some mighty case. The boys had, indeed, been very curious during the time which intervened between the receipt of the note which Mr. Morton had punctilliously sent to each and the appointed time of meeting.

They knew that Marjorie's father was an active patron of sport, that there never was a football or baseball match, a golf tournament or a tennis competition in which Mr. Morton had not some part. The rowing club and the cricket teams knew him for their benefactor. Mr. Morton was, in fact, a man who had not as yet survived his boyhood. His

life had been so easy and free from care that his interest was still keen in the amusements which had rejoiced his youth.

The boys naturally concluded, therefore, that it must be some jollification that was being planned, but what it was they didn't know. There they were all grouped about the largest tree, which had that bench around it upon which the girls so often were seated. Mr. Morton stood on this elevation, the better to make himself heard.

"It isn't politics that I want to talk. Nor football, nor yet baseball. It is none of those things, now. And yet it is sport in a certain sense and very good sport too."

The eyes that were watching Mr. Morton gleamed, one and all, with anticipation.

"I believe," went on the gentleman, "that you all take a very kind interest in Miss Mary Pemberton?"

There was a general murmur of assent from the boys.

"And that you have so far done everything in your power to make her visit pleasant. Boys, the powers that be at Hornby Hall have decreed that that visit shall end on Thursday."

He paused. There was a silence of evident re-

gret on the part of the boys. They waited eagerly for what came next.

"What would you say if we should try to prolong it?" asked Mr. Morton, impressively.

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried the Ironton boys in eager chorus. For like most other boys who are honest-hearted and unspoiled they had a fund of sympathy which was easily stirred.

"You have some idea, I believe, of the loneliness of Hornby Hall," continued Mr. Morton; "none of you would like to go and live there."

"I guess not!" rang out Jack's sharp tones, with which the other voices chimed in.

"Yet it is worse in some ways for a girl," added Mr. Morton.

This sentiment was not so generally applauded. Girls were somehow expected to spend more time indoors and to be content with quieter places.

"In any case," went on Mr. Morton, " you would help, if you could, to keep Mary Pemberton in Ironton."

This suggestion astonished the boys. So that for the moment they were silent.

"Let every boy who is willing to help put up his right hand," requested Mr. Morton. This time there was no hesitation. Every hand went up in

an instant. Shy Hugh Graham jostled Jack in his hurry, and Dick got ahead even of Jack, pressing to the front like a chivalrous little knight eager to assist a distressed maiden.

"Well, I see you are all with me," said the orator of the evening. "Now, the first thing, my fine fellows, is secrecy, absolute secrecy. Without that nothing can be accomplished, and I will have to insist on secrecy after as well as before the event. This is a conspiracy compared to which the conspiracy of Cataline or any other in history is as nothing."

Now the word conspiracy is dear to every boyish heart and the idea of secrecy was delightful. Only, the curiosity of Mr. Morton's listeners was growing painful. What event, what mysterious happening, required such secrecy? What, they asked themselves, could they have to do with Mary Pemberton's staying, and where was the sport to come in?

"Each boy must promise secrecy on his word of honor," resumed Mr. Morton. "I have united here to-night only those whom I know well, those who are the habitual companions of my own little girl and of her cousin Dick. Therefore I trust you implicitly and your word will be as good as any man's oath."

The boys blushed with pleasure.

"A gentleman's word should be always equal to his oath," declared Mr. Morton, "and the boy who is to make anything of himself in the world should respect his own word and hold it sacred. I am not here to preach, but to tell you how complete is my confidence in every one of you."

"Thank you, sir!" cried several of the boys.

"And now we are not precisely, my young friends, going to beard the lion in his den, but it is something very much like it."

The boys' interest grew keener.

"In other words, we are not going, precisely, to storm Hornby Hall, but to invade the mysterious territory about it."

The boys, by an involuntary movement, drew closer together and nearer to Mr. Morton. Here was such a bit of fun, of daring, of adventure, as had never before been offered them. Jack and Dick remembered the delicious thrill of fear, the creepiness of even looking over the wall. And now, under a strong and able leader, they were going to advance into that hostile, that unknown territory and do battle in some shape or form for the defence of the weak.

"To-morrow night we shall set out from May-

fair at ten punctually," announced the leader. "There is no moon, so the darkness will be our best friend. We shall proceed to the Hall on foot. It would never do to go in carriages, because should the affair be discovered, better that it be set down as a bit of boyish mischief, so that the serious object of our expedition may be concealed.

"For we have a serious purpose, though this is not the time or place to make known to you what that purpose is. Moreover, my lads, all you who are determined to go must be strictly punctual. I have nothing more to say at present."

With these words, Mr. Morton descended from his elevated position on the bench under the great tree, and the boys crowded about him, eager, full of questions, and promising without fail to be present at the appointed time.

"You can leave all the details to me," declared Mr. Morton; "whatever is required for the expedition will be forthcoming."

"Mr. Morton," urged Jack, somewhat subdued in speaking to the older man, "why do you come with us at all? You can plan everything and leave us to put the plans into execution."

Mr. Morton fixed his eyes upon the lad, as Jack continued to explain his idea.

"Because you see it's this way, if anything should be found out it is better, as you said a while ago, that it should be charged to the boys."

Mr. Morton still looked thoughtful, but presently he said:

"Ah, but there's another side to the matter. Should the affair become serious and have any grave consequences, which I trust may not be the case, I must be in a position to say: These boys were only my instruments; I accept the responsibility of what has been done and I am prepared to give satisfactory reasons for my acts."

Jack's face fell a little. For, in truth, he was a boy who liked to act as leader and was never quite contented in being merely a subordinate. However, it was not a point which admitted of argument. She had run out of the garden, where she boys and returned to his home. There he found Marjorie waiting for him in considerable excitement. She had run out of the garden where she had been playing with Mary and Dolly Martin in the soft, calm starlight. She had divined that something unusual was on foot and she was a little resentful that the girls could have no show in the frolic of which her father had spoken.

"Never mind, Marjorie, old girl," said the in-

dulgent parent; "if all goes well we shall have such a celebration on Thursday night as Ironton has never seen."

"Thursday, papa? But Mary will be gone."

"And that would be to have Hamlet with the prince of Denmark left out," laughed Mr. Morton, "but, perhaps, we can manage to keep her a little longer."

"Oh, do you think so?" questioned Marjorie joyfully. Then her face clouded over. She suddenly remembered the visit to Hornby Hall and the look and tone of old Mr. Pemberton as he said to Mary: "You will return on the same day and hour next week. I shall wait for you, with my watch in my hand."

"I am afraid her grandfather will be very angry," Marjorie suggested, "and that awful Mrs. Miles. Mary is so much afraid of her."

"We must see if we can't protect Mary against this bugaboo Mrs. Miles," said the father, confidently. "So don't worry, little girl. As I said, if all goes well we shall have our celebration, with Mary Pemberton as guest of honor."

With this Marjorie had to be content, and giving her father a parting hug, she ran off to join her friends, followed with great bounds by Nero, who barked his appreciation of the fun and leaped the garden fence as if to have his share in the game.

CHAPTER X.

THE LONG BARN.

Now Mr. Morton, to prevent all anxiety on the part of parents, had telephoned to each of the boys' respective households that he was taking the lads with him on a certain expedition and that if they were delayed after the usual hour of returning there was no cause for anxiety. He was a little fearful of the responsibility he was taking, but he felt that the cause was a good one, justifying some risk, and that there was scarcely a chance of any harm coming to the devoted little band. The terrors which they should have to face and which gave zest to the undertaking would be chiefly those of the imagination.

The night appointed for the proposed expedition was as dark as the most romantic lover of adventure could have desired. There was no moon

and the stars, faint in the haze of heat, gave little light. The air was still and sultry, as if somewhere a storm might be lurking, and flashes of sheet lightning occasionally lit up the heavens. The boys set out, resolute and brave, all intensely in earnest, though they had no idea that anything of consequence was at stake. A stout stick was provided for each one of the party, and these, with a couple of dark lanterns and a rope which Mr. Morton fancied might be useful, constituted the equipment.

They met, with much secrecy, under the trees in Mayfair, talking in whispers and feeling generally as if they belonged to some desperate association and were setting out upon an expedition of awful import. Mr. Morton gave the word to move:

"Are all here?" he asked, in a cautious whisper. "Steady then, lads, and away. Keep close together, talk little, and be prepared to obey orders."

There was a delicious thrill in the breast of every boy, as they all plunged into the darkness, Jack and Dick walking ahead with Mr. Morton, while Hugh and the elder Wallace followed close upon their steps and Luke and George Wallace brought up the rear.

"Isn't it prime?" whispered Luke. "Mr. Morton's a brick."

"You bet!" answered Ned Wallace sententiously. "I wonder where we're going!"

"To Hornby Hall," promptly answered Hugh Graham.

"Not to the house!" chorused the three others with some awe.

"No, I think not," admitted Hugh; "I wonder what we're going to do?"

"We're going to a mighty creepy place, anyway!" Ned Wallace declared, with a note of exaltation in his voice. "Have any of you fellows been there after nightfall?"

It transpired that they all had been there, taking observations from various points.

"I'm not funking, nor anything of that sort," went on Ned, "but I'm glad we're not going into the house."

"I don't know," Hugh said, "I almost wish we were. It would be so exciting."

For this shy lad had a bold and daring spirit which would stop at nothing.

"Oh, it will be exciting enough, all right, when we get there," Ned predicted with confidence.

"Mr. Morton's lantern and slouched hat make him look like a burglar," whispered George Wallace to Luke Morris.

Luke giggled.

"I know we're going in somewhere or we wouldn't need lanterns," observed Hugh Graham.

"Into some outhouse, I guess," said Ned Wallace, with faint uneasiness. Ned was no coward, but he did not want to run too great a risk.

As the party neared its destination, all conversation ceased and the boys pushed on after their leader in a silence which was full of excitement. The air grew cooler somewhat as they proceeded, and along the way they were met by the odors of many gardens and the scent of blossoming trees.

Suddenly, at a turn of the road, Hornby Hall came into sight, standing far back amongst the trees, white and cold and ghostly in the uncertain light. The band of adventurers stood still a moment, and after that their movements became more cautious and furtive. They did not proceed up the avenue with its stiff rows of poplars, but struck into a stubble-field which flanked it. They had now to advance slowly and with the greatest care, for the ground was uneven and there were many pitfalls and snares for the footsteps of the unwary. They reached a point presently where they had a rear view of the house, the stables and outhouses, and the high-walled garden.

Here they stopped and took observations, each boy with bated breath and beating heart. Everything lay ghastly white and still. Not a point of light anywhere, not the slightest movement. Had Hornby Hall been deserted, it could not have been more fearfully quiet.

"So far so good!" said Mr. Morton. "And now, my lads, over that hedge, and if the courtyard gate be open our path is clear. If not, we will have to make a considerable détour to reach the long barn."

"The long barn!" the boys simultaneously exclaimed in a whisper which despite them was tremulous.

"I can take you there with absolute certainty if we are not discovered. I know every inch of the ground. I spent my holidays at the Hall when I was a boy at college."

The boys looked at him as if this circumstance gave him a new and strange interest.

"And now, soft and still. I will get over yonder hedge first to see if the gate is open. If I wave my lantern, you will all follow at once, and then comes the greatest point of danger. Inside the gate there is a passage, rather narrow, leading past some of the side windows of the house to the courtyard.

We have to pass through that, with the fear of Argus eyes being upon us or our movements overheard by ears trained to catch the slightest sound. So, soft and still. Hold your very breath!"

Mr. Morton vaulted lightly over the hedge and instantly waved his unlit lantern. The gate stood open, a gaunt shape in the darkness, and through it they passed, with a feeling in the breast of every boy that he was going to his doom. For the shadow of the house was upon them, that house of mystery and horror, and it was so near, so appallingly near. The windows seemed to look down on them like frowning, sullen faces. There was the thrill of a forlorn hope in their veins as they followed Mr. Morton, with cautious, creeping footsteps, through that narrow passage, feeling each moment as if a hand might be outstretched to catch them or a harsh voice sound in their ears.

At last they reached the courtyard, where, at least, there was breadth and they could avoid close contact with the house. Mr. Morton breathed more freely. The Argus eyes, he thought, must be closed in a deeper sleep than normal. Still he did not relax his vigilance. The one who might be watching them was cunning and would give no sign. The party passed through the courtyard, however, still

undisturbed by sound or sight. Presently there was the outline of a long, low building, remote from all the other outbuildings.

"That is the long barn!" announced Mr. Morton, "and we have come to search the long barn."

There was something delightful and mysterious in the idea of a search, implying possible strange discoveries and hidden treasures.

"Keep close now!" commanded Mr. Morton, "and follow me! The long barn might chance to have a tenant."

His face looked grim as he said those words and he grasped the rope more tightly in his left hand.

"A tenant!" he repeated, having before his mind's eyes the one who might be there. To the boys the idea suggested was one of nameless horror. It might be any one or any thing, they thought, with shivers of the old creepiness which had always come over them in their expeditions to Hornby Hall. The atmosphere seemed suddenly to have a chill in it, unwholesome, fetid, as from a swamp. Mr. Morton paused to listen. All was still. He lifted the latch, while the boys could almost hear the beating of their own hearts, fearful of what might be disclosed on opening the door. Even their grown-up leader felt that it would be, to say the least, un-

comfortable should he find himself confronted by the face of Mrs. Miles. Mary had said that she often visited this place by night. Still, he had in his mind the plan of action to be adopted in such an emergency.

When he actually opened the door, the place was dark and silent. No ray of light came out into the night, only the smell of hay and flying particles of grain or dust stirred by the sudden entrance of the air. Mr. Morton hastily stepped across the threshold, signaling for the boys to follow him. When the door was closed again, he cautiously lit one of the lanterns and took a hasty survey of the big, empty barn, with its bare walls, its dusty floor, and the roof overhead, gloomy and impenetrable, wrapped in darkness.

"We must place a couple of sentries outside," Mr. Morton said; "it would never do to let ourselves be approached unawares."

For Mr. Morton reckoned all the time upon Mrs. Miles, being desperately cunning, and knew that she might have been observing their movements for some time and might, consequently, play them a trick.

"Who will volunteer for sentry duty?" he asked.

Now, this was a very hard part of the service, for

the curiosity of all the boys was at fever heat and they burned to explore this mysterious long barn, the very name of which was ominous, just as its interior was sinister and forbidding. Moreover, it was not the pleasantest thing in the world to be stationed outside in that chill, unnatural atmosphere, with the chance of being discovered by one of those dreaded shapes which they vaguely believed to belong to Hornby Hall. After a moment's silence, Hugh Graham, who had the spirit of a hero in him, stepped forward.

"If it is necessary, sir, I will do it," he declared, simply.

"Thank you, Hugh," Mr. Morton said, with a grateful glance at the boy's resolute face. "I know it is hard on you not to be in at the death, when we have, so to say, run the fox to earth. But, believe me, you shall know and see whatever we may discover as soon as that is possible. You will take the end of the barn near the house and one of these other lads will take the other. You are the tallest and strongest, Luke Morris, apart from Jack and Dick, whom I require in the barn."

Luke reluctantly consented to take up a post at the other end of the barn, and followed Hugh out into the chill of the night.

The landscape looked more dreary than ever. There was no smell of flowers or of blossoming trees to sweeten the air. The wind had freshened into gusts which sent eddies of dust into the boys' faces.

"I hope they won't be long in there," observed Luke to his fellow watcher. "I feel as if I'd like to cut and run."

"A soldier can't desert his post," declared Hugh, stoutly, "and we're soldiers for the time being. I don't feel a bit like running. I feel like fighting and as if I would be rather glad if some one should come along that a fellow might tackle."

"Don't!" cried Luke. "There isn't any one round here that could be tackled," and he looked around him in the darkness as if he fancied that such a wish as his companion had expressed must be followed by the immediate apparition of some one.

"And just think of the girl," said Hugh, in his fine, manly way, "who has to live here all the time. If we can help her, I don't mind anything."

With an almost weird vividness the picture of that girl came up in the minds of both boys. A something forlorn in her appearance, an appealing sadness in her brown eyes, which yet could sparkle with fun, the sober coloring of her clothes, her dif-

ference from most girls, seemed to show that she bore about her the shadow of this place.

"I guess I wouldn't like to have to live here always!" Luke said. He was standing quite close to Hugh, thus in a sense deserting his post, while Hugh stood resolutely upon the spot indicated by Mr. Morton. "It's the meanest, snakiest place I ever saw and I guess the folks in it aren't any better."

Here a pair of hands, protruding from somewhere, caught each of the boys in a vise-like grip. Their heads were brought together and deliberately knocked very hard. It must be confessed that Luke collapsed altogether under this attack, which was all the more dreadful that it was both mysterious and unexpected. But Hugh's courage rose. He deliberately struggled bravely in the strong grasp and called out repeated words of warning in a high, firm voice. Unfortunately, the warning was unheard, and a hand was pressed firmly over his mouth. Another instant and the hand was replaced by a handkerchief, which gagged him completely. His hands were drawn behind his back and bound together securely. Luke, who lay upon the ground, not daring so much as to look up, was similarly treated and both boys were laid helpless, side by side, on the ground.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LOFT OVER THE LONG BARN AND WHAT WAS IN IT.

MEANWHILE Mr. Morton had not been idle within the long barn. He was, in fact, so occupied and so engrossed with what was taking place that Hugh's warning fell upon deaf ears.

"A boy will have to go into that loft," he declared.

Jack and Dick both volunteered immediately, but Mr. Morton decided the matter in his brisk fashion.

"Dick shall go up," he decided, "and you, Jack, shall be his ladder. Get up here on this round of wood."

Jack, who was not altogether pleased with this subordinate post, stepped onto the round stump of a tree which had evidently been used for sawing purposes.

"Now stand firm, brace yourself against the wall and I will hoist Dick onto your shoulders. Wait

a moment, Dick; here, let me put this rope about you—it will be useful in coming down."

Dick obeyed and was quickly hoisted into position on Jack's shoulders, where he was presently standing upright sustained by Mr. Morton and the wall in front of him. He was in a position to grasp the flooring of the loft, and at the word of command from Mr. Morton swung himself up. He was too excited to feel fear of this mysterious region, which looked so dark and uninviting. Once landed, Mr. Morton commanded him:

"Reach down now for a lantern!" Dick Dalton did so, taking the light from Mr. Morton's hand.

"Now, my boy," the leader directed, "leave not a corner of that loft unsearched. Report to me every object you find there, and look in every crack and crevice. For we want to find a will, my boy, a will that will give us Mary to keep forever."

The boys all were excited by this time and Jack looked curiously up at his friend.

"I wish I too could go up, sir! I think I could manage to climb without assistance," he pleaded.

"You might get up all right," declared Mr. Morton, "but how about you, or Dicky either, getting down? You see Dick will require a ladder to get down on."

Jack was forced to stand discontentedly by while Dick disappeared in the darkness.

"There seems to be another room!" he called down.

"Another room!" exclaimed Mr. Morton. "Hurry, and tell us whether there is anything in it."

Dick pushed open a door, which gave a strange, creaking, jarring sound, and he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"It is full of things!" he called down.

Jack groaned.

"Let us see some of them," Mr. Morton commanded.

Dick, after fumbling about a few moments longer, presently threw down a bundle containing what seemed to be clothes folded loosely together. In the light of the lantern, there was the sparkle of something bright about them. Mr. Morton looked closer.

"By all that's wonderful, a regimental coat!" he cried. He looked still closer, examining one detail after another of that strange discovery. Then he gave a subdued cry.

"Phil Pemberton's uniform!" adding under his breath, "that he was accused of selling to pay some debt."

"Uncle Harry!" cried Dick in high excitement from above, "there's jewelry up here."

"What! Jewelry?" asked Mr. Morton, in quick, hurried tones. His face was very pale. He seemed to be on the track of a mystery more singular than any which had as yet enshrouded Hornby Hall."

"There is a bracelet!" cried Dick, and he drew near to the edge of the loft, holding up something which caught the lantern light on a shining surface.

"An amethyst bracelet?" Mr. Morton inquired, in the same breathless tone.

"Yes, and a couple of rings, and a watch with a single diamond in the cover."

"For the stealing of these jewels Hester Primrose and Malachy O'Rourke were brought before the magistrate," said Mr. Morton in a hushed voice, as though speaking to himself and forgetting the presence of the boys. "The man escaped by some flaw in the evidence and left the country still under suspicion, and the woman served a term in prison."

Jack and George, made round-eyed with wonder, gazed in bewilderment at Mr. Morton. They felt as if they were in a dream and as if their leader had suddenly become crazy. Meanwhile Mr. Morton stood as one dazed, recalling with a vividness

of recollection that was startling how he, as a boy, had tried and failed to climb into that loft, which was even then a place of mystery. Phil Pemberton alone had succeeded and had been very proud of his achievement, describing, with a quite patronizing tone, to Harry Morton and the other boys what the place was like.

"There's a big loft and there's a room off it that I guess was meant for a stable boy to sleep in, and there's a good deal of rubbish lying around. It's a jolly good hiding-place, anyhow."

Mr. Morton seemed to hear Phil's boyish voice again, and he recalled how Phil had further confided in him alone: "While I was poking around," he had said, "my foot knocked against a board in the far corner of the loft, and when I examined it I saw it was made almost like a door, with a hinge on it. I opened it, and there was as neat a little cupboard as could be."

Phil, the adventurous climber, the gay companion, had grown into a jovial, generous-hearted, careless man and was dead long since, while his father had changed from an ordinary stern man of arbitrary nature into something terrible and malign. Hornby had fallen, as it were, under a curse and had become a byword in the neighborhood.

But that chance discovery of Philip Pemberton's long ago flashed into Mr. Morton's mind as he heard Dicky proclaiming that there were heaps of things above, ladies' dresses, and boxes full of ornaments and strange-looking toys, but not a bit of paper anywhere. Mr. Morton drew closer:

"Dick," he said in a whisper, as if he feared the walls had ears, "go to the right-hand, farthest corner of the loft and feel about till you find what seems to be a loose board."

Dick obeyed and Mr. Morton waited with breathless attention. Even if the hiding-place could be found, which Phil would probably have thought of and used when secreting his will, there was just one chance in a hundred that Mrs. Miles did not know of it from the first, or stumble upon it in some of her excursions to the barn. For it was evident that she had frequently visited the loft by means, no doubt, of the ladder the loss of which Mary had heard her deploring.

Mr. Morton strongly suspected she had hidden away there a number of articles—articles the disappearance of which had brought trouble and disgrace upon others.

Dick felt about for some time in the dark corner of the loft, where the cobwebs hung thick and the

dust almost choked him. He set the lantern beside him upon the floor and passed his hand over every board, stooping low that he might not strike his head where the roof of the barn sloped down to the floor. At first he could find nothing, and Mr. Morton, waiting, found the time very long. At last Dick cried out:

"I've got the place, sir. The board opens and—"

"What is there?" questioned Mr. Morton breathlessly, "a place like a cupboard?"

His voice was husky with emotion.

"Yes, sir, and there are—papers!"

"Papers!" cried Mr. Morton, fairly trembling with eagerness. "Take them all, Dicky, every scrap of them."

Dicky was heard rustling amongst papers. Jack gave a quick, warning cry, George Wallace something like a shriek, and Mr. Morton turning suddenly found himself confronted by the ghastly face of Mrs. Miles, whiter than ever, full of a deadly malignity and an almost insane fury. Such a smile was upon her face as once seen would be remembered for a lifetime.

Mr. Morton uttered an exclamation, but the woman spoke no word—simply transfixed him with that look, which sent the blood curdling in his

veins, brave man that he was. In common with the other boys and girls, he had feared her in his childhood, but how much more dreadful she actually was than the creature of his imagination! It seemed as if all the evil deeds she had done had accumulated their traces on her face in broad lines for all to read. Unlike the others at the Hall, her hair had not grown gray, but was of a vivid red, contrasting with small, gray eyes, bereft of lashes, which somehow gave the effect of being forever open.

As she looked at Mr. Morton with that evil look and ugly smile, he saw in her thin, claw-like hands a key. He glanced at the door. She had locked it. Following his glance, she spoke at last. Her tones were icy and rang hollow through the barn; they reached upward to the loft, so that Dicky when he heard them shrieked in common with the other boys below.

"Do you think," she said, "that he will ever come down from there with his precious find? Do you think I will let you help him down as you helped him up? Do you think that I will be baffled? No! I shall do something which will defeat all your finely laid plans."

"You are mad!" said Mr. Morton, coldly, "and

probably have been so for years, which may explain some of your doings."

And yet her threat, vague though it was, made Mr. Morton feel uneasy, and he wished that they all were safely out of the business—he and these boys whom he had brought into it. He was not a pre-eminently religious man. But he was a practical Catholic and had great faith. So that he immediately thought of praying, a short but fervent prayer. His wife was praying at home, he knew, in the oratory. He could get help from the Sacred Heart he honored every month by going to communion with his wife and giving an example to other men of the place, who argued somewhat in this fashion:

"There's Morton, who is a regular tip-top swell and a jolly good fellow, as well as a shrewd business man. He isn't ashamed to be seen going to the altar."

And this train of reasoning brought others to the altar, too, just as Jack's and Dick Dalton's regular attendance at the monthly communion caused many a boy to do likewise.

Mr. Morton stood, therefore, in that big, dimly lighted barn and prayed that the schemes of this wicked woman might be baffled, so that more than one hidden injustice might be brought to light. And

as he prayed he said as if by inspiration, scarcely knowing why himself:

"Take care! Remember Mr. Philip and Miss Bessie Morton, who became his wife, and the others whom you have wronged!"

The woman cowered as though she had been struck. She staggered back against the wall, her eyes staring into Mr. Morton's face, her lips contracted, the key falling to the floor. Mr. Morton, who had used the words only in a general and indefinite sense, could not understand the effect he had produced, but he took immediate advantage of it. Quick as a flash he seized the key and then, without violence, but firmly and strongly, he pushed her through a half open door which led into a small room partitioned off from the barn. He held the door firmly on the outside while he called to Jack:

"Quick! The padlock from the outer door!"

This being obtained, it was but the work of a moment to secure the entrance to the primitive compartment.

"Now," he cried, "we must make haste to get Dicky down and away from this accursed spot as soon as possible. Never did a darker cloud of treachery and perhaps worse hang over any place."

Mrs. Miles within the compartment preserved a silence which was more awful than any speech could have been, and suggested that the fertile mind of the spider-like woman might be intent upon some new evil device.

The boys meanwhile stood with white faces, visibly quaking with fear. For Mrs. Miles' appearance and manner had been something altogether outside of their experience, and justified the very worst they had ever heard concerning Hornby Hall and its inmates. To get Dicky down was a much more difficult task than it had been to get him up, but it was finally accomplished. Attaching an end of the rope which Mr. Morton had put round his body to one of the beams in the ceiling, Dicky let himself slide down till his feet touched Jack's shoulders. Mr. Morton seized him and held him firmly as soon as he came near, for greater security. Every one drew a breath of relief when Dicky was landed safe upon the floor. For so strained were their nerves by the appearance of Mrs. Miles and the knowledge that she still was near that they feared there might be an accident.

"I wonder what has become of our sentries!" exclaimed Mr. Morton; "surely they did not desert before the fight was well begun."

As he spoke thus, he gathered up the rope, the lanterns, and stored away with the utmost care the papers Dicky gave him, and which, from a hasty glance, he believed to be precisely what they had come to seek. While he was thus occupied there was heard a curious creaking and straining sound from within the adjoining room. After listening a moment or so, Mr. Morton went over and unlocked the door. Too late! the place was empty, a small window which he had forgotten stood open. With a cry of vexation, he left the barn hastily, calling upon the boys to put out the lanterns and follow him at once, keeping very close together.

But outside the long barn was another delay. The boys they had supposed had run away lay upon the ground, breathing with some difficulty because of the bandage over their mouth. Luke was badly scared, but Hugh got up with a brave smile.

"Are you hurt?" Mr. Morton asked eagerly, forgetting all else.

"Oh, no, just shaken up and out of breath," said Hugh. "She came upon us so suddenly; I tried to warn you by calling, till the woman gagged me and threw me down."

"It wasn't a woman at all!" cried Luke, with a

shudder. "It was some awful thing. Hugh did call out as loud as he could."

"I thought I heard a call," said Mr. Morton, "but we were all busy at the moment, hoisting Dick up, and as it was not repeated, I thought my ears had deceived me. But it will be all right now, if we once can get clear of the grounds."

Somehow he felt uneasy indeed, for he knew that Mrs. Miles was a woman of resources and that she was just now desperate. He marshalled his little force in close order, keeping every one under his immediate eye, and so they pushed on till they found themselves once more in the courtyard. They crept along in the shadow of the outbuildings till they had almost reached the narrow lane, which was the point of danger. Suddenly they all stood still with one accord, their further progress arrested by a strange sight.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. MILES PLAYS A COMEDY.

THE whole of Hornby Hall, or at least that portion of it giving upon the courtyard in which they actually were and the lane through which they had to pass, was suddenly lit up as by a flash. Electric light was comparatively little used, as yet, in Ironton, and the effect was, to say the least, startling, the more so that it proved the household to be on the alert. The boys drew closer to their leader, with the flush of the excitement on their cheeks and a quick beating of the heart. They stood still for a moment, when Mr. Morton ordered them, gazing at that ill-starred dwelling, with its stern walls looking white and wan in the glare from within. A sound passed through the poplars, the moaning of the wind in their tops, which seemed to the excited fancy of the listeners like some sinister prophecy of evil. But within the mansion everything seemed still. Not a sound proceeded from door or window.

Mr. Morton, bidding the boys remain where they were, crept forward to reconnoitre. He was care-

ful to keep as far as possible out of range of any concealed weapon which the malice of Mrs. Miles or the mistake of some one else might aim at him. For what more likely than that he and his little band might be mistaken for burglars, even though Mrs. Miles did not purposely give the alarm?

It did not seem probable to Mr. Morton that Mrs. Miles would disclose his identity to her master. He became somewhat assured that there were many mysteries, from which the curtain had already been partially lifted that evening, which would prevent her from so acting. But the woman was one hard to reckon with, and there was always the possibility of the master of Hornby himself being on the alert.

However, as everything seemed quiet when he reached the entrance to the lane, he swung his lantern as a signal for the boys to come. They obeyed, hastening forward as swiftly and silently as young Indians. They had got over most of the terror which had seized them in the long barn at sight of Mrs. Miles, and now some of them were almost wishing, with the foolish confidence of youth, that something would happen.

They followed Mr. Morton into the lane, where they found themselves as before uncomfortably

close to the house, the light now throwing each of their figures into distinct relief. And when they had reached about the middle of that narrow passage, they saw to their dismay the great stone gate at the end swing to upon its hinges. It could not be opened from the inside, as Mr. Morton well knew, and he gave a low cry of anger.

As they stood still in consternation, a laugh which was like no sound the boys had ever heard suddenly broke on the stillness. Even Mr. Morton's stout heart quailed at the mocking outburst which he knew proceeded from the malice of a desperate woman. Presently a voice spoke, icy in tone, with a deadly hissing sound:

"Caught like rats in a trap! Shoot, master, fair and straight!"

Though the figure of the woman was hidden from them, a hand was seen outstretched and a long, bony finger pointed straight at Mr. Morton.

"Don't let him escape!" the voice cried again, "for he's carrying away what you have sought for many a day. Tell him to drop the papers and you won't shoot."

Mr. Morton only felt in his breast coat-pocket to be sure that the papers were safe. Then he crouched down close to the ground, motioning the

boys to do likewise. The unearthly laugh rang out again with the words:

"Oh, you must wait till they rise, master, or can you get a good aim there near the ground?"

One of the boys, Georgie Wallace, who was the smallest of them all, had begun to wiggle toward the gate. What he meant to do when he got there he didn't precisely know, but when he reached it he found his move had not been such a bad one. The earth had been washed away somewhat by the rains from one portion of the gate and, seeing this, the boy began to dig with both hands, throwing up showers of earth like a little mole. He tried once to squeeze himself through the aperture, but it was not large enough, so he went to work again with a will. He was in a much safer position than any of the others, being farther from the window and less likely to be a target for any invisible marksman. And as he worked, he reflected:

"All the others have done something or had some share in the business. Only I have done nothing. So if I could get the gate open for them, it would be a fine thing."

His steady work was rewarded, and in a very few minutes Georgie stood panting and breathless on the other side of the gate.

"Shoot some of the rascals—they are trying to escape. Shoot at once, master, or it will be too late," screamed the voice.

And just then there was a diversion. A second voice was heard within the room and, astounding sight! an old man was wheeled into the square of light by a second old man, who moved like an automaton.

"What is going on here?" cried the man in the chair. "Why is the house lit up? What comedy are you playing, Mrs. Miles?"

"It is no comedy, but more like a tragedy," answered the woman, who was evidently disconcerted by this sudden appearance.

"Tragedy! Pshaw! The tempest in a teapot of a nervous woman!"

"Tempest in a teapot, if you will, but a man and half a dozen young rascals have been trying to—rob the hen-roost."

The lie was told with deliberation, but the sneering voice of the master, so like and yet so unlike her own, caught at the word.

"The hen-roost, woman, the hen-roost! Is that a reason I am to be deprived of my rest and Hornby Hall made a beacon for all the prying knaves in the country?"

The woman was silent, and the master of Hornby ordered his attendant:

"Wheel me to my room, Hodgkins, and you, you jade, put out these lights as soon as I have reached there."

"But if it wasn't the hen-roost alone?"

"What, then?"

"Hornby Hall itself might be fair game for a gang of thieves."

"Hornby Hall! They haven't entered the house?"

"No, but—"

"But—no buts!" cried the despotic old man. "Some thievish country louts may be lurking about in search of a fowl or two! Wheel me away, I say, Hodgkins!"

The woman made no further attempt to stop him. Perhaps she was not too anxious for him to inquire further. When the grating sound of the invalid chair had died away in the distance, there was an interval when all was darkness; then the light blazed out again, and the bony finger pointed.

But the noise of the invalid's chair was followed by another—the creaking of the great gate upon its hinges as Georgie Wallace pushed it open from the outside. And there stood the opening, framed in its frowning iron. Through it, with a half-sup-

pressed shout of exultation, the boys bounded, followed by Mr. Morton.

"Bravo, my brave George, bravo!" cried the leader, and all the boys joined in a chorus of applause for George's plucky deed.

"She might have kept us there all night," said Jack to Mr. Morton. That gentleman responded seriously:

"God knows what she might have done. She would have been capable of doing anything to get back those papers, but she was foiled at every turn and she dared not tell the master."

Then they hurried homeward through the deepening darkness of the middle night, a prayer of thankfulness on their leader's lips and the fragrance of trees and gardens meeting them once more, with a twofold force and sweetness because of the rank atmosphere they had escaped.

And here is what Mr. Morton saw when he locked himself in his study, with his wife leaning over his shoulder, to take a hurried glance at the papers. In the first place, the last will and testament of Philip Pemberton, which he put aside to read on the morrow. In the next, a faded and discolored sheet of paper, on which had been hastily scribbled:

"This paper I will put in the hiding-place with my dear Philip's will. God grant it be found some day, to explain whatever mystery may be about my fate. For here I have been shut up by the arch-fiend of a woman, she having first drugged me, because I had come to the knowledge of at least one awful secret, which I shudder to recall."

Husband and wife together, with pale faces, proceeded to read the detailed account of certain events which had followed upon each other. They interrupted their reading with many exclamations of wonder, of amazement, of horror. What they read shall be explained hereafter in this simple narrative, and shall throw some light on all the darkness which had enshrouded Hornby Hall.

"This must be laid before old Pemberton," said Mr. Morton, "at the earliest moment."

His wife assented dumbly. She could not speak at first. Her agitation was too great. Only she gasped out:

"Thank God, Harry, that you and all the boys are safe out of that dreadful place."

"And thank God, too, that Mary need never go back to it," said Harry Morton. "But I will examine all these papers carefully before any step is taken."

CHAPTER XIII.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE GREAT EVENT.

It was not until the following morning that Mr. Morton could give his wife any details of the expedition which had ended so fortunately. When all had been related to her she could not help shuddering at thought of some of the events of that memorable night. She told him in turn how Marjorie and she had gone to the oratory to pray, lighting the candles at their little shrine, and that when all was ready Marjorie had brought Mary in, amidst her expressions of the greatest delight and wonder.

"I never saw any beautiful pictures like those," Mary had said, pointing to the pictures of Christ and the Mother of Sorrows. "I would like to know who they are."

"Marjorie was quite scandalized at first," Mrs. Morton said; "she could not understand such ignorance. Mary exclaimed that no one ever prayed at Hornby Hall. I can see that religion is as

carefully shut out from that place as poetry or sentiment or anything that makes live beautiful."

"It was high time she was removed from that atmosphere," remarked Mr. Morton, "and I certainly will never permit her to cross its threshold again, unless perhaps, if many things are cleared up, as a guest. But now we must get to work, for I am determined to have our great celebration no later than Thursday night."

"Thursday will not be long in coming," suggested Mrs. Morton, doubtfully. "Would it not be better to postpone it a few days?"

"No, no!" I promised Marjorie and the boys," persisted Mr. Morton, "and it can be done by rushing things a little. By the way, won't Mary need some girls' fixings for the party?"

"I have thought of that," declared Mrs. Morton; "I sent some measurements to Wanamaker some days ago, with all details as to how I wanted a frock made. A very pretty white dress arrived half an hour ago. With some vivid scarlet flowers from the garden to brighten her up, Cinderella will be quite transformed. I am going to ask her to try it on this afternoon, so that Julie can make any necessary alterations. I ordered some smaller things as well, shoes, and ribbons, and gloves."

"Capital!" exclaimed Mr. Morton, rubbing his hands in great delight. "I'm as big a boy as any of the Mayfair crowd, and I feel as if I couldn't wait till Thursday to see the girl in her new finery. By George! it's like living in a fairy tale just now."

He hurried off to the garden, where his personal supervision was urgently required in the great preparations that were being made. One or two of the tallest trees had to be sacrificed, and a platform for the musicians had to be erected over some flower beds so carefully as not to damage them. Another and larger platform was also erected whereon games might be played and the dancing take place, which was to consist of Virginia reels and old-fashioned quadrilles calculated to delight the souls of these Ironton boys and girls. For they were, in fact, boys and girls, and not little old men and women, as is too often the case. Even the older boys with their college airs had wholesome and simple instincts and could enjoy any form of fun.

Mr. Morton devoted himself all that day and the next to the decoration of the garden. In this he was ably assisted by the Mayfair boys. Chinese lanterns of glowing red were hung upon the trees. Amongst the rose-bushes and flowering shrubs were

placed smaller lights, which would give a delightful effect when the great day arrived.

Fancy booths decorated in the daintiest of colors were erected for the serving of ices and fruits, cakes and confections of all sorts, bonbons innumerable, and such iced drinks as were suitable for young and old. It was sorely against Marjorie's will that she and Mary were excluded from all these outdoor preparations, for Mr. Morton wished the scene in the garden to be as complete a surprise as possible. With this object in view, Mary had to be kept in the house and excluded from that region of delight. She and Marjorie were very honorable about it, and when they passed the stair window, which would have given them an excellent view of all that was going on, they resolutely shut their eyes. One thing, however, irritated Marjorie very much, and that was the sound of Jack's eager voice in the garden below.

"Won't he give himself airs after this," she cried, "with his patronizing 'we did this' and 'we did that'."

Mrs. Morton set the girls to work making mottoes for her, giving them for materials colored paper to fashion into shape, and a great box of small candies and sheets of old-fashioned verses to

wrap and arrange. This they found a delightful occupation which whiled away the time till that other event to which Marjorie was looking forward and in which neither Jack nor any other boy could have a part. That was the trying on of Mary's new frock, whose very existence was still a secret to its fortunate owner. So, as she sat and snipped at the paper, fingering out the ends of the mottoes carefully so that they might be as nearly as possible like the old-fashioned ones in use in Mrs. Morton's schoolgirl days, Marjorie kept a watchful eye upon the clock.

In a flash a sudden recollection had come to Mary. She laid down her scissors and let the colored paper fall from her hand.

"What is it?" asked Marjorie, looking up quickly and sympathetically.

"Oh, Marjorie!" cried poor Mary, "Thursday is so near. Won't it be dreadful!"

"Mary," said Marjorie solemnly, "I'm sure my father doesn't intend to let you go back till the next day, anyhow."

"Oh, I can't stay another day—they would kill me," wailed Mary, "and yet I feel as if I could never go back."

"Do you think if my father thought of letting

you go he would have had the party on Thursday night?"

Mary's face brightened a little, but she was not very hopeful. To her, Mrs. Miles and the dreadful grandfather were omnipotent. They could not be defied. Just then Mrs. Morton came in to get the two girls. They were almost finished with their task of motto-making, so she sat down for a few minutes and helped them in the cutting and snipping to hasten matters.

Then they all went up to Mary's room, where Julie, the French maid, with a genius for needlework, was in waiting. There was a large box on the bed.

"You may wait in Miss Marjorie's room, Julie, till I call!" said Mrs. Morton, and when the door had closed on the woman's somewhat reluctant figure, for she was human and would willingly have assisted at the little scene which followed, Mrs. Morton said:

"Mary, you know there is to be a party to-morrow night."

"But I shall be back at Hornby," Mary sighed.

"Not quite so soon, my dear," protested the good lady; "that will, however, be explained later."

She was interrupted by a voice from without:

"Hurry up, in there! and get the child into her fixings. I want to come in and have a share of the fun."

Mrs. Morton smiled.

"At a party," she explained to Mary, "every one will be gaily dressed. Marjorie is going to wear pink muslin."

Mary's face turned crimson.

"I, I, am afraid I can't be at the party. I should look awful, for I, I haven't any dress like that."

"Well," said Mrs. Morton, "your grandfather would naturally never give any attention to such things, but a woman like myself who has a daughter knows all about it. So I chose this frock for you, my dear. The best I could do in a short time. Come over and look at it."

Mary went forward mechanically and stood beside her kind friend. The box was opened and the gown lifted out. Mary stood stupefied. Even Marjorie had nothing so pretty. That same convulsive working of the face which marked her deep emotion, and the slow dropping of the tears, were Mary's answer, as she turned grateful eyes to Mrs. Morton.

"Oh, it is too beautiful for me to wear!" she said at last. "I have never had anything like it, never anything at all but dull gray and brown."

"Well, this is your very own and you are going to try it on now, at once, so that Julie may see if it needs any alteration," said Mrs. Morton.

There was another impatient thump on the door from Mr. Morton. His wife hastened to help Mary into her new finery, while Marjorie hopped from one foot to the other in glee, admiring the gown and its transforming effect upon her friend. Then she rushed to the door to admit her father, who laughed in his whole-hearted way and rubbed his hands, declaring that Mary was like a fairy queen. After that there was more diving into the box, which gave forth gloves, fans, bright-colored ribbons, and other pretty knick-knacks, that fairly bewildered poor Mary.

"And," said Mr. Morton, "I may as well tell you that you are not going back to Hornby on Thursday, no, nor on any other day that I know of."

"I am not going back to Hornby!" Mary repeated, slowly.

"Not if I know it. Not even if you wish to go!" cried Mr. Morton, laughing. "You are my prisoner now and I'll keep you more securely than your last jailer did. So just make up your mind, Miss Mary Pemberton, to settle down here in this little room beside our Marjorie."

With that, Julie came in for some final touches to the costume and Mr. Morton went away. When Marjorie and Mary finally were left alone, Marjorie hugged Mary delightedly, exclaiming gleefully:

"Oh, isn't it splendid that you are to live here always and will never go back to that awful Mrs. Miles and Hornby!"

Mary could only laugh and cry and repeat over and over that she couldn't believe it true, that she knew she would have to go back, and that her grandfather and Mrs. Miles would be terribly angry.

When Mr. Morton descended to the garden he was greeted by Jack Holland, eager and full of enthusiasm.

"I tell you, sir, it's going to be a regular tip-top affair," he cried, "the finest that has ever been in Ironton."

"We've got up about two hundred lanterns already," announced Dick, whose face was very red and whose hands were soiled with earth. Hugh was seen in the distance digging; Luke Morris was up a tree with his mouth full of tacks and his hands of twine, and the Wallace boys were handing him up lanterns.

"Oh, I say, Uncle Harry," went on Dick, "it's

prime, and getting ready is just as much fun as the party."

"More, perhaps," asserted Mr. Morton, "anticipation means so much. But wait till you fellows see the girl you helped to rescue, all fixed up in her new toggery. And while I think of it, I want you all to be here at four o'clock sharp to-morrow, Thursday afternoon, that is, if you want to feel a glow of honest pride."

"We'll all be here," agreed Jack, though, as Mr. Morton explained no further, he was rather in the dark as to the reason for the invitation and the hint about honest pride. He thought the glow would come in better about 8 P. M., when the result of their labors would be apparent to at least half the population of Ironton. He made no remark, but went back to work, like the rest, with curiosity unsatisfied.

When Mrs. Morton came down to take a final survey of the garden, she was delighted. Only, she remarked to her husband, with a little doubtful air:

"My dear, it almost seems as if this would have been more appropriate when everything is cleared up and the battle fought and won."

"I want it to come now!" declared Mr. Morton. "I want to blow a whole blast of victory before the

fight begins. I guess the news of Thursday night's doings will penetrate even into Hornby Hall."

So Mrs. Morton said no more, but continued her preparations within doors. For she had a couple of pastry-cooks up from Philadelphia who were making many delicacies in the house, though many things were coming up by train on the day of the festivity. For the Mortons were not people to do things by halves; and though it was first of all a children's party, all the old, gray-headed children who had kept enough youth about them for such frolics had been bidden to the feast by the swift feet of the Mayfair boys, who acted as mercuries.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DELIGHTFUL FESTIVITY.

On Thursday afternoon by four o'clock everything was in readiness for the wonderful festivity of the evening. But an event was yet to happen which while it lasted dulled the keen edge of anticipation. Mr. and Mrs. Morton waited at the head of the steps, surrounded by all the boys and girls, forming a circle around Mary. The little girl was pale and faint, and despite her kind protectors seemed oppressed with fear. She knew and they did not the powers against which they were contending. All the vague terrors and mysteries which, more even than positive ill-treatment, weighed upon her at Hornby Hall seemed to concentrate about her in those moments of suspense. The unfortunate child felt that Fate, which was represented to her by Mrs. Miles, must be against any efforts for her rescue.

There was silence in the group. No one could speak till that critical moment had come and gone. It was on the stroke of four. The hush, which had seemed to deepen, was broken by the noise of wheels upon the road. The same premonitory cloud of dust arose as before from the highway and the lumbering van-like carriage of Hornby Hall rolled on steadily toward the Mortons' gate.

Involuntarily the boys and girls closed in around Mary, as though forming a bodyguard for her defense. The carriage entered at the gate and drove slowly around the drive, stopping at the foot of the steps. The white-haired coachman touched his hat and in the manner of an automaton addressed Mr. Morton.

"For the young lady, sir," was all he said, after which he sat staring motionless before him, as though he saw some strange object which riveted his attention.

"You can return to Hornby as you came!" said Mr. Morton. The man stared.

"Mr. Pemberton bade me say he is waiting with his watch in his hand for the young lady," he mumbled in a listless tone.

"I am afraid his hand will get very tired if he does that," commented Mr. Morton; "so you had

better make haste back to tell him that the young lady is not returning to Hornby at four o'clock today, nor on any other day or at any hour that I know of."

Here was defiance. Mary gazed at the carriage with distended, frightened eyes. The boys held their breath. In fact, they seemed to have been doing so ever since Mr. Morton told them what he wanted of them at the particular hour of four. The coachman touched his hat again, but instead of turning away, began to drive slowly up and down before the door, as if waiting for some one who must surely come out of the house and get into the carriage. Mary felt in this the relentless purpose which seemed to pursue her and which would ultimately triumph. At length Mr. Morton spoke to the automaton on the box of the coach:

"You had better go back and relieve Mr. Pemberton's anxiety."

"I daren't, sir, without the young lady."

"I think the old gentleman's anger will not grow less if you keep him waiting after the hour."

This argument seemed to have some weight with the man. He gave a curious, questioning look at Mary, where she stood amongst the girls and boys.

"You had better come, Miss," he declared,

quietly. "Your grandfather and Mrs. Miles are waiting for you."

Mary trembled all over, and so strong was the force of habit that if left to herself she would assuredly have got into that dreary van, and have been driving away staring straight before her in an intensity of mental anguish. Nor would this latter feeling have been lessened by the thought that her grandfather's watch would have shown her to be several minutes late.

"*You, you* had better go!" cried Mr. Morton, more sternly than before. "Mr. Pemberton and Mrs. Miles may want you."

The automaton reflected a moment more, then he touched his hat and drove away, slowly until he was nearly out of sight of the house. Further on he was seen to urge his horses to their fullest speed. After that the boys and girls sat for some time quite still, vaguely sharing Mary's terror. The sights and sounds which the boys, at least, remembered since their nocturnal visit to the Hall did not tend to reassure them.

Something of the chill of Hornby Hall had crept into the atmosphere, and the face of Mrs. Miles, as they recalled it, sent a coldness even to the bravest hearts. It seemed, too, as if that dreadful poten-

tate, who had ruled at the dreary dwelling so long, must despatch some messenger of evil to avenge his discomfiture, and as if the iron will, which had ordered events so long, must in the end prevail. Mr. Morton himself was paler and graver than usually he was and Mrs. Morton was visibly frightened, but the former laid a reassuring hand on Mary's shoulder.

"You see the old shandrydan didn't swallow you up after all. You don't belong to some enchanted palace in the olden time, but to the land of the free. You may be certain, my dear, that from this day forth you will be as free as it is well for a good, Catholic girl to be."

Mrs. Morton put an arm round Mary and whispered:

"You poor dear! you poor dear!" Marjorie and Dollie were very near crying.

"And now, boys, for the glow of honest pride!" cried Mr. Morton. "Don't you feel it in your sturdy, American hearts? You have helped me to make this thing possible and to show cause for my act. You have saved Mary from Hornby Hall. While you know a little of the matter yourselves and have helped so well in what has been accomplished, I cannot as yet give you all details. So three cheers

for Mary Pemberton, and away with you all, to make ready for to-night."

The three cheers were lustily given. They may have reached the driver of the dismal van if he was not too far off, and they certainly rang through Ironton with a sound to make men and women raise their heads and ask: "What's going on up to Mortons'?"

There were great things going on, in truth, and after that first shiver of natural fear, the boys were exultant, proud of what they had done, and of the very secret, which though it was on the tip of their tongue they had to keep for the present. Their mothers and fathers could not imagine what it all meant and what was the matter amongst the boys. Dicky Dalton, when he had completed his toilet for the party and stood before his mother to display his finery, suddenly exclaimed:

"Mr. Morton's a brick, I tell you. Just wait till you see Mary!"

"Is she a brick, too?" inquired the mother.

Dicky reflected. He was a very loyal-hearted boy and he felt very sorry for Mary, but he was not quite sure that so strong an adjective could be applied to her. It would be far more suitable, he thought, for Marjorie. He could hardly explain

the difference to himself. Yet he liked Mary and felt sure he would like her even better when she had been longer a member of the Mayfair circle.

"Mary isn't exactly a brick," he replied to his mother's question.

"What, then?"

"Oh, I don't know, mother dear. Wait till you see her and hear all about her."

This was pretty much the burden of all the boys' talk, though Jack was more patronizing and dogmatic in his expression of opinion: "Mary isn't a half-bad sort of girl, considering the rum life she has led, and she has a good deal of style and looks like a lady."

With all of them, including those college youths of pretensions, eight o'clock upon that memorable evening seemed a very long way off. At last it rang out from the belfry of the Presbyterian Church, its strokes falling impressively on the air, as though they were saying:

"Now it is time! Now it is time!"

Dick Dalton had an uncomfortable feeling that they said more than that.

"Hornby Hall! Hornby Hall! Hornby Hall!" sounded in his ears at every peal. He mentioned this fancy of his to Jack and certain others of the

boys, but they promptly silenced him, for it gave them an uncomfortable, creepy feeling. And that when they all were setting out in their best clothes along a very dark road to that wonderful festival of the Mortons. Dick was glad when the bell stopped ringing, though by that time he and his companions were drawing near to the Mortons' gate. The older people were invited for an hour later, as the host and hostess had decided that the young folks should have things all their own way for a while. When the boys entered that dazzling garden, they looked about them dazed, though they themselves had helped to produce the effect. Dicky caught Jack by the sleeve.

"Look there!" he cried excitedly, "look there!"

And both turned their eyes to where Mary stood in one of the fairy-like marquees, receiving with Mrs. Morton and Marjorie.

CHAPTER XV.

MARY IS A CENTER OF ATTRACTION.

FOLLOWING Dick's example, Jack stood quite still and looked at Mary. In all the wonderful scene before them there was nothing so wonderful as the transformation of that girl. Her slender, upright figure was fitted to perfection by the pretty, yet not too elaborate gown. Her cheeks glowed like the scarlet geraniums at her neck and in her belt, her dark eyes shone with happiness and the excitement of the occasion. For she was happy. She seemed to have cast off every fear and to enter into the enjoyment around her with a zest and relish which no other girl or boy amongst all those who filled the garden could imagine. For the others had experienced something of the sort before, had been in gaily dressed crowds and had seen young people of their own age enjoying themselves to the full.

"Dick!" whispered Jack, "she looks like some of those girls in the Arabian nights, or those sort of things."

"Yes," said Dick, "she's like those enchanted princesses we used to read about when we were kids. I hardly dare speak to her."

"But we must, you know," declared Jack, with that self-confident manner which he used at college when acting as usher on festive occasions. Dick followed him silently, and as they neared where Mary stood Jack plucked a flower.

"Mary," he said, "here is a very nice, sweet-smelling rose. I hope you will wear it at your belt."

"Thank you!" said Mary, simply. "It is very kind of you," while Jack looked round to note how many persons saw and approved his act of gallantry.

Mr. Morton was in the thick of the fun now, calling upon all the boys and girls to join in a great Virginia Reel and making Mary dance with him because she didn't know a step. Or again, he led a jovial Blind Man's Buff, or started Musical Chairs and Hunt the Slipper.

Mary, it must be owned, had been completely dazed on coming into the garden. She had stood

very white and still, her hands clasped, looking as if she could never look enough. The countless lights flashed upon her with a marvelous brilliancy, softened yet not obscured by the foliage; the lanterns in the trees seemed like great globes of fire and those hung on the bushes threw into relief the rich coloring or the delicate whiteness of the flowers. It was a gorgeous effect of light and color and warmth, all of which elements had been wanting in Mary's narrow life, while the rich perfume of many flowers and blossoming trees, blended with the exquisite strains of the orchestra, rendered it all the more dream-like.

After a time, as the boys and girls whom she knew came in, she was conscious of a pleasant sense of companionship, feeling that they all were her friends, while they, in turn, vied with one another in the warmth of their greetings, just as if they had known her all their life. Mary entered very quickly and fully into the spirit of the games and delighted in the intricacies of the various dances, which she followed lightly and gracefully, laughing heartily when she made a mistake. She seemed to have entirely shaken off, for the first time in her life, the malign shadow of Mrs. Miles, behind which sat her grandfather, and she felt as if in reality

a new life had begun for her and the old one had been left behind forever.

She went about with her friends to the various tents, tasting the delicious lemonade and sweet things. The ices she thought were too beautiful almost to touch, varying in design from a bird of paradise, with its tail of flaming gold, to a basket of pink roses on a high-turreted castle. She particularly enjoyed playing hostess with Marjorie to the groups of smaller children, pressing upon them the various dainties, which many of this smaller contingent eyed with wistful wonder. Mr. Morton had invited the children of all degrees, without distinction as to classes.

Also when the "grown-ups" arrived it was seen that notes of invitation had been sent not only to the Pomeroys and the Gerards and the Carpenters and a score or so of other families who represented the gentility of the place, but also to John Worth, and Jeremiah O'Meara, and various other local worthies. It was a sort of patriarchal festival, the first of its kind ever given by the Mortons, who were exclusive and conservative to a marked degree. Every one felt very much at home, for they all knew one another after a fashion. The wealthier folks showed the cordial courtesy of their

good breeding to their humbler neighbors, who returned it in kind, with a pleasant geniality and a hearty, if somewhat rough good will. Most of the latter, indeed, departed somewhat early in the evening, so that the intimates were left behind to wind up the affair in a great frolic.

When all were assembled, however, and before any one had left, Mr. Morton presented Mary as the guest of honor and announced that she, being his ward, was hereafter to remain under his guardianship. This caused a great sensation amongst the older folks, and brought joy to the hearts of the Mayfair boys and girls. Mr. Morton had to meet a shower of questions from his friends as to the new state of affairs, and as to how he had ever persuaded old Pemberton to give up his granddaughter. Little groups likewise discussed in well-bred whispers the past relations between the Pembertons and Mortons, the break that had come, which had been generally supposed would be permanent.

Mary's looks and bearing were much commented upon, some seeing a resemblance in the girl to her mother and others vowing she was a Pemberton. Mary shook hands with every one present, showing a grave friendliness and interest in all. Singular

as it may seem, she was by no means shy. She returned the cordial pressure of old Jeremiah O'Meara's hand as warmly as she did the greeting of the dignified gentleman with gold-rimmed spectacles and imposing air who offered a friendly, if somewhat pompous recognition to the daughter of a once prominent house. In fact, Mary rather preferred Jeremiah of the two, because the other in some remote way reminded her of her grandfather, whom he spoke of familiarly as Tom. Mary, transfixed by the gold spectacles, wondered vaguely if the speaker knew Mrs. Miles as well.

"Tom Pemberton, your grandfather, my dear," began the old gentleman, pausing to clear his throat, while Mary, gazing fixedly at the spectacles, thought there was something strange in calling her grandfather Tom, and intimating that he had ever been a boy or had other than white hair.

"Tom Pemberton was a gay lad," the old gentleman went on, chuckling to himself, "eh, you remember, O'Meara?"

"I do that, sir," replied Jeremiah; " a fine young gentleman he was when first I came to the place."

"Just so," the old gentleman agreed, "and a wild blade, up to his ears in every kind of mischief."

Mary could scarcely believe her ears. It was monstrous. The old gentleman must be dreaming.

"A wild blade!" she repeated mechanically to herself. She did not know what the word meant thus applied, but she concluded it was something which did not fit her grandfather. She knew what mischief meant. Mrs. Miles had often given that name to some of her own most innocent acts and had accused her of being up to mischief. But that her grandfather should be similarly accused seemed incredible.

"Oh, I could make you laugh," continued the old gentleman, "at some of his pranks at college. For we were in the same year and I sat close beside him. I remember him, for example, riding round the room upon a make-believe hobby-horse and upsetting the Professor who chanced to be coming in the door."

This was too dreadful. It seemed like profanation and as if she would be punished for hearing such things said. She continued to look solemnly at the old gentleman, who laughed immoderately, supported by Jeremiah, at the picture he had conjured up. Suddenly, Mary's face relaxed and she, too, joined in the laugh. For the sense of humor inherited from her mother made her suddenly aware

that it was intensely funny so to imagine her grandfather. She laughed and laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks, and people began to stare at the spectacle of the two old men and the grave child laughing together uncontrollably. The more she laughed the more they laughed, too, and others joined, without understanding the jest, but from the simple contagion of merriment, till there was quite a laughing chorus.

In the main, Mary liked all the guests, just because they were real persons, persons who had been so long a mystery to her, represented to her as they were only by Mrs. Miles, her grandfather, and the servants, who seldom spoke. Probably, however, the best part of the evening was when all were gone except the Mayfair boys and girls, who stayed a while after the others and talked things over. Meeting every day in that pleasant place, amongst the trees and in the long grass, they had all their amusements in common. Somehow, they seemed to fit in together; they were sworn comrades all and their chaffing of each other was nearly always good-natured; and they had the same jests and, to a great extent, the same way of looking at things. Mary felt they all were her brothers and sisters, ready to stand by her till the end.

Even Marie Lewis forgot her young lady airs with Mary and was as simple and natural almost as Marjorie, and Florence was fast developing into the sort of girl like Dollie Martin, whom every one liked. Kitty Hogan was the newcomer's devoted champion and would not hear a word said derogatory to her looks or her manners or her speech. So they all sat and talked in that lovely garden, which was now a "banquet-hall deserted." Every detail of the evening's festivity was discussed and they sang a few jolly choruses, winding up with that old and familiar ditty, applied now to Mr. Morton:

"He's a jolly good fellow,
Which nobody can deny."

Many of the revelers who had not yet reached home caught the well-known strain and joined in it, to the confusion of the quiet village of Ironton and the few stay-at-homes who for one reason or another had not been present. It also set many a dog barking, as even in their canine way they, too, desired to join in the chorus. Even the staid old Mt. St. Bernard came out of his kennel and solemnly bayed at the foolish ones who did not know at what they were barking. This sent Marjorie into a paroxysm of laughter, after which she hugged

Mary and said she was "a dear" and that "it was lovely to think she would always be with them."

The lanterns were extinguished at last, the orchestra had ceased, darkness and silence fell over that scene of abounding glow and glory and over the tranquil village. Upon the serene mountain heights and river the stars looked calmly down, twinkling in the blue depths of the sky.

The echo of that festivity and of Mr. Morton's announcement had already reached even the seclusion of Hornby. A rare occurrence indeed, one of the Hall servants was sent into the village, ostensibly to buy some utensil, in reality to pick up news. And as he had hung about till a rather late hour, he heard the great news from some of those homeward bound. Mrs. Miles had kept the intelligence to herself, but a lamp burned late in her room that night, and her ghastly face might have been seen staring out vengefully in the direction of Henry Morton's house. For she, too, had heard in the evening's festivity the first bugle call of battle and the clarion note of the enemy's ultimate victory.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. MILES GROWS DESPERATE.

NEXT afternoon most of the boys and girls assembled in Mayfair to talk over the previous night's fun. The boys lounged about in various attitudes upon the grass. Marjorie was in her favorite perch on the branch of a tree. Mary sat sedately on the bench with Marie Lewis on one side of her and Dollie Martin on the other. Marie was teaching Mary Pemberton to crochet in bright-colored wools, which was a new and fascinating employment which she learned with wonderful facility.

"They teach us such a lot of things at the convent," observed Marie, in her slightly affected voice.

"The convent, what's that?" inquired Mary.

Marie looked at her in surprise. None of the girls or boys could get quite accustomed to her phenomenal ignorance.

"Oh, it's where we go to school," explained Marie, "where nuns teach, don't you know?"

Mary looked more puzzled than ever.

"Is a nun a woman?" she asked.

There was a choking sound from the grass and Dick Dalton turned away a very red face, while Ned Wallace clapped his hand over his mouth and Luke Morris snickered audibly. The tree-top shook vigorously just then, which fact suggested the idea that the boys' mirth might have got up there and infected Marjorie. But Marie Lewis managed to preserve her gravity. She was a very well-bred girl. Dollie Martin only smiled.

"Oh, yes, nuns are women," Marie explained, quite seriously. "But you must come and see them sometime."

"Perhaps you'll be going with me to school at the convent in September," suggested Marjorie from above.

Mary flushed with pleasure. She was eager to learn, for Mrs. Miles' teaching had been rather elementary and the girl keenly felt how much less she knew than any of these boys and girls of her own age.

"Won't that be lovely!" chimed in the other girls. "We shall all be there together."

For the next few minutes the convent formed a deeply interesting topic. That mysterious region elicited many inquiries from Mary and very soon she knew the names of the different teachers and of a number of the pupils. Marjorie descended from the tree in the interests of the theme and talked away hard and fast, joining in all that gossip of school life which is so fascinating to convent-bred girls. The trivial incidents, the harmless jokes, the current events were all minutely chronicled. The day was recalled when Marjorie had been admitted to the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin, while Marie Lewis was made Vice-President and Florence Lewis would not be let in at all for six months, because she persistently talked in the halls and classrooms.

The boys soon wearied of a conversation from which they found themselves excluded and tried a little desultory talk amongst themselves on the more congenial topics of football and baseball, but they showed signs of boredom. Dicky Dalton got up and strolled down the road, saying he would probably look in again later. The girls paid no heed to his going, so engrossed were they in convent recollections, and the birds in the tree-tops did not chatter more briskly than did they. Suddenly there was an interruption. The sound of wheels was

heard and all craned their necks to see what heavy vehicle might be approaching. It was obscured, at first, by a cloud of dust, then Marjorie and Jack, the keen-eyed, uttered a simultaneous exclamation.

"Oh, Mary!" cried Marjorie, drawing near and putting an arm protectingly about her.

"I say," shouted Jack, forgetting manners in his excitement, "it's the carriage from Hornby! I see the old driver's white head!"

There was a moment of blank consternation in the group. No one had anticipated such a thing. Even Mr. Morton had taken it for granted that the affair was settled or, at least, that he should hear from Mr. Pemberton through his lawyers. Therefore no such event had been expected and no preparation made for the emergency.

Mary turned as pale as death, but stood quite still, saying nothing.

"Father is gone to town!" exclaimed Marjorie in a hushed tone of dismay. Mr. Morton had, indeed, gone to Philadelphia on that very business, to see his lawyers and have everything concerning his guardianship of Mary put on a legal basis, and Mrs. Morton had gone with him to do some shopping.

The Mayfair girls, who all were present except Kitty Hogan, gathered helplessly around Mary, and

the boys prepared gallantly to protect her. The carriage drove straight in through the Mortons' gate. The children in Mayfair had, for the moment, passed unnoticed, for they were keeping very quiet under the trees.

Was there an occupant of the carriage? The children held their breaths. They watched to see the white-haired coachman alight and ascend the steps. But he did not do so. Instead, the carriage door was opened and a woman heavily veiled stepped out.

"Mrs. Miles!" cried Mary, with a shuddering, sickening terror in her voice.

Jack Holland did not stop to think. Moved by a sudden impulse, he took Mary's hand.

"Come," he exclaimed, "you can't face her!"

For he had seen Mrs. Miles on the memorable night in the long barn, and he knew whereof he spoke. Mary, wild with terror, seized the outstretched hand and fled, keeping pace with the fleet-footed Jack, who was the swiftest runner at college. When they were in the heart of the wood, which lay at some distance up on a height overlooking Mayfair, Jack stopped.

"Sit down," he said, and as Mary leaned back exhausted against a tree he fanned her with his hat.

"She'll never find you here," he said, reassuringly. He felt sorry for "the kid" as he glanced at her wan and terror-stricken face.

"If she should come—" Mary cried, looking up at the tall figure of the boy where he stood, erect and vigorous, his eager face flushed by the exertion of running.

"Oh, at the worst, I think I can take care of you," declared Jack, manfully. "She can't bully me, and I'd like to see her lay a finger on you when I'm around."

For all his airs, he was an honest-hearted, manly fellow, with a protective feeling toward whatever was weak, and he was full of indignation against the woman who made this poor girl's life miserable. Being courageous, he was also strong and athletic. Mary's own courage rose a little when she looked up at him. During this past dream-like week she was experiencing the new sensation of having people to protect her and stand between her and evil.

She had been so forlorn, left to the tender mercies of Mrs. Miles, who had made it her delight to invent new and cruel methods of "disciplining her," as the phrase had been at Hornby Hall. So she rested in the pleasant coolness of the wood, where

the glare of the sun was shut out by the green trees overhead, with a feeling of comparative security.

"I guess the other fellows will show fight down there, all right enough," Jack thought. But he was, in truth, a little anxious and extremely curious to see the upshot of the affair. At first, those of the boys and girls who remained were very averse indeed to showing fight, with the solitary exception of Hugh. He restrained the rest when they would have run after Mary and Jack to the woods, saying that Mrs. Miles would probably follow and that, as she couldn't hurt any of them, they had better stay and face her.

This seemed reasonable, though not altogether satisfactory, and the little band stood still awaiting Mrs. Miles, who had been ringing the Mortons' door-bell. She was met at the door with the information that Mr. and Mrs. Morton were out, and Miss Pemberton too. The maid, who knew something of the affair, especially after a startled glance at the eyes which seemed to burn through the veil, did not think it necessary to say anything about Mayfair. But Mrs. Miles, turning to go down the steps, cast her sharp eyes around and pierced the group of boys and girls under the trees. She made directly for them, passing out of the gate with her

swift, cat-like tread, and across the road. Mary's companions waited for the woman with trembling fascination as they saw her draw nearer and nearer.

There was something terrifying about the woman, something weird and eerie, to which Mary's terror at the very mention of her name and their own imaginations added indescribably. Luke Morris, who had felt the clutch of her bony fingers and had seen her evil face close to his in the shadow of the long barn, gave vent to his feelings in a groan. He was admonished by Hugh Graham to "shut up."

Yet even Hugh's stout heart quailed within him as Mrs. Miles came near. He thought it would be less fearful if she were not veiled, if that face he too had seen, ghastly in the darkness, could be revealed, clearly and plainly. She entered at the gate, and seemed to bring something of the chill and dark atmosphere of Hornby Hall into the pleasant field of Mayfair, strewn with daisies and buttercups upon which the sun shone down so warmly.

Mrs. Miles came close to the trembling group and suddenly raised her veil. She had often punished Mary simply by standing before her, especially at night, and glaring at her. So she glared on the present occasion, speaking no word for fully five

minutes. Marjorie could not endure it and shudderingly hid her face on Dollie Martin's shoulder, while the Lewis girls and Luke Morris turned away and fled ignominiously. They took care, however, not to betray Mary's whereabouts by going in the direction she had taken.

"Gosh!" cried Luke, apologetically, when the two stopped at last for breath. "I couldn't stand it!"

Marie looked at him with a smile in which there was some contempt. Timid herself, she admired courage in others, especially in a boy. Luke read the glance and, feeling ashamed, managed to stammer out:

"If you had got the fright I did the other night, when I was sentry at the long barn, you wouldn't wonder that I ran away."

Marie, who was not outspoken like Marjorie, merely said: "She is very terrible and I am never brave. I'm a wretched coward."

"I'm not always a coward," pleaded poor Luke. "You can ask the other fellows."

"Oh, I'm sure you're not!" Marie murmured in her gentle voice. "This fearful woman is enough to frighten any one. Think of poor Mary's having to live in the house with her."

"She won't any more," Florence Lewis remarked. "Mr. Morton says he is going to keep her here. But do you know, I think it was dreadful of us to run away and leave them."

There was an expression of real regret on her honest face as she spoke.

"Well, it can't be helped now!" Marie exclaimed, rather shortly, "and I think we'd better get away from her or the carriage may be coming."

This thought sent all three homeward as speedily as possible.

Meanwhile Hugh Graham manfully stood his ground, well to the front of the group, and the Wallace boys, though in fear and trembling, for they were neither very big nor very brave, supported him. Marjorie and Dollie, it must be confessed, kept behind the tall figure of their young protector. Mrs. Miles let her cold eyes, fierce with a terrible malignity, travel from face to face. Then she said, in the hissing, icy tones which Mary had always found so terrible:

"So the bird is flown!"

This being undeniable, no one said anything.

"But do you think I will go back without her?" she inquired, striking her umbrella upon the ground, as if it were an oaken staff.

'Even if Miss Pemberton were here," declared Hugh, firmly, "we couldn't let her go back without Mr. Morton's knowledge."

"Oh, you couldn't!" cried the woman, drawing so near to Hugh that it seemed she meditated doing him violence.

And then a sudden courage came into Marjorie's heart. She was after all the daughter of the house. It was for her to speak and she had been taught never to shirk doing the right thing. She stepped forward, throwing back her head with its tangled curls, and took her place by Hugh Graham's side.

"I am Mr. Morton's daughter," she announced.

"You are Mr. Morton's daughter, are you?" Mrs. Miles repeated, wagging her head from side to side and advancing close to the girl. "You are Mr. Morton's daughter?"

The words, as they were uttered, sounded portentous, and there was a new gleam of deadly malignity in the woman's eyes. For at that moment a sudden resolution took possession of Mrs. Miles and she stood still, weighing the chances for and against her plan, in the dark recesses of her mind.

"And Hugh is quite right," Marjorie went on, resolutely; "even if Mary were here we couldn't

let her go with you, for my father says she is never to go back to Hornby Hall."

"If she's not to go back to Hornby Hall," cried the woman, clutching Marjorie with almost insane fury, "how would you like to go in her place? Here, Silas Greene!"

The white-haired coachman sprang from the box, just as Mrs. Miles raised Marjorie in her strong arms.

"Take care of that young fool there," she cried, pointing to Hugh, "till I get this wildcat into the carriage."

Silas Greene, rushing at Hugh, grappled with him, tripping up Ned Wallace by a dexterous movement of his foot as he sought to interfere, so that he fell sprawling on the ground. George Wallace, leaping the fence, made a rush across the road toward the Mortons', and Dollie Martin ran for Jack, screaming at the top of her voice. Jack heard and came down at full speed, at the very instant that Dick Dalton strolled in at the gate.

They lost not a moment in words, but made a simultaneous rush toward Mrs. Miles, seizing and holding her, while Jack sternly bade her put down the young lady. She stood still, only tightening her grasp upon Marjorie.

"Dick, you hold her, and I'll soon make her give up her prize!" said Jack, and in another moment Marjorie stood flushed, indignant, terrified, but free.

"Get into the house as quick as you can," ordered Jack. "We'll hold her till you're perfectly safe."

Marjorie's flying feet crossed the road at the very time that George Wallace's frantic pounding upon the door had been heard. The frightened women servants were now seen upon the steps, deploring the fact that Jerry was away and had taken the dog with him.

Mrs. Miles, seeing that Marjorie had escaped, stood the picture of sullen and baffled rage.

"Put me into the carriage!" she ordered in a hard voice. "Silas Greene, drop that fool and come on."

The coachman did as he was told, relaxing the iron grip he had taken of Hugh Graham, for he was a powerful fellow despite his white hair. He mounted the driver's seat and prepared to drive off. Mrs. Miles' face was terrible to behold. Her hair streamed down from under her bonnet, which with the veil had fallen off. Her eyes glared, and she was more livid of color than ever. She was a bold and desperate woman, and it had seemed possible to her by securing possession of Marjorie to

effect a compromise with Mr. Morton, whom she guessed was in possession of much information concerning her. And it would be, moreover, a delightful revenge upon her enemy. All her plans had been upset by the bold and resolute action of the two lads. She was now nursing a sullen fury, which threatened to break forth into fierce imprecations.

"You fools! you vipers!" she cried, shaking her fist at the boys, "I'll be even with you yet, and as for that bird that's out of the cage, I'll never rest till she's in it again."

By this time the cook and the housemaids, with Julie at their head, were running distracted across the road agitated and curious. Mrs. Miles never deigned them a word or glance:

"Drive on, Silas Greene!" she commanded.

And the lumbering, van-like vehicle drove away down the dusty highway. The boys stood, and looked after it, as it took that awful presence from their sight and lives forever.

CHAPTER XVII.

VISITORS TO HORNBY HALL.

WHEN Mr. Morton returned home and heard what had occurred, his indignation was so great that he was narrowly restrained by Mrs. Morton from going directly to Hornby Hall.

"I would not go to-day," urged the wife; "your right to the child is now clearly established, and when once that is made known to Mr. Pemberton, the woman Miles will hardly care to put herself in opposition to the law. Moreover—"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Mr. Morton, grimly, "we may be able to draw her claws effectively when I have had that interview with old Pemberton."

"I would wait, then, till you are perfectly cool and collected."

"I am cool enough now, for that matter!" cried Mr. Morton, wiping his brow, but his wife only smiled and laid a hand upon his arm, and he had to

smile, too. It was agreed, however, that Mr. and Mrs. Morton should go together and literally beard the lion in his den. They felt confident they would be able to clear up, once and forever, the mystery which had so long cast its dark shadow over Hornby Hall.

It was certain that, in any event, Mary was to remain with the Mortons, to go to the convent with Marjorie in the autumn, and to be at once instructed in her father's faith, in which, it had been definitely understood at the time of the marriage, she was to be brought up. It would depend entirely on the dispositions of her grandfather after he heard Mr. Morton's tale whether or not Mary should be allowed any further communication with the home which had been little more to her than a cruel prison.

When the next morning dawned, bright and fair, Mr. Morton wandered about aimlessly, unable to settle to anything until that critical interview was over. The carriage was ordered for two o'clock precisely, and into it stepped the husband and wife. All the boys and girls had assembled in Mayfair, having some idea of what was going on.

"I leave Mary in your care," Mr. Morton cautioned the young folks, "but if there should be any sign whatever of Mrs. Miles or of the carriage

from Hornby, go instantly into the house, where admittance will be refused Mrs. Miles or any strangers. And there is one addition to your circle I would suggest."

"Who is that, papa?" asked Marjorie, wonderingly.

Mr. Morton pointed to the kennel, whence protruded the head of the Mt. St. Bernard. The dog got up lazily, as if aware that he was being made the subject of the conversation, yawned, stretched himself and advanced, slowly wagging his splendid tail as if it were a plume.

"He will be your best protection," went on Mr. Morton. "With him stretched at Marjorie's feet, well! even Mrs. Miles will hardly dare lay a finger on any one of you."

This proposal was hailed with satisfaction, though the older boys asserted they could take care of the girls without assistance. Jack, in particular, was somewhat boastful, in consequence of the happenings of the previous day, and poor Luke Morris, reddening to the ears, could scarce raise his head. The group, indeed, ranged themselves in order of battle, but as the afternoon wore on without any signs of the enemy, they engaged in a game of tag. They were careful always, however, to keep a sharp

lookout. Nero, sympathetic dog that he was, joined in the sport, leaping over the daisy- and buttercup-strewn grass in ungainly frolics, barking joyfully and otherwise showing his good will. Or, again, he lay down upon the grass, under the tree, watching with benevolent eye his young mistress and her companions, all of whom, in his wise dog-fashion, he regarded as persons to be trusted.

When tired of the game, the circle reformed on the benches in the shade and talked over late events, in that pleasant, confidential manner into which children, as well as their elders, occasionally glide, particularly when any grave crisis is at hand. For the boys and girls all felt that there was something unusual in the air, and the stress of the last few days had united them wonderfully. All was peace and harmony, like that between the grass and the flowers, or the birds and the leafy tops of the trees. Even Jack and Marjorie refrained from their everlasting strife of tongues. All the children knew that Mr. and Mrs. Morton had gone to Hornby Hall and that Mary's fate trembled in the balance, and this made them thoughtful. But they did not fail to look up and down the road occasionally, lest Mrs. Miles should steal upon them stealthily.

Mrs. Miles, however, was meditating no such

attempt. She was peering from an upper window of Hornby Hall, behind a dingy shutter, at the carriage which drove rapidly in at the avenue gate. It turned its course through the stiff lines of poplars as surely and steadily as fate. Once at the house, the bell jingled sharply at Mr. Morton's ring, and the woman with the white, scared face opened the door at the summons and returned to inform her master. The husband and wife waited in that once familiar room. It was now both dreary and ghostly, with the dank chill coming in from the weed-grown garden without. Mr. Morton stood before the picture of his cousin Bessie, and regarded it with the wistful gaze which maturity gives to that which recalls youth.

He was thus occupied when the grating of the invalid chair was heard on the polished floor and Mr. Pemberton was wheeled into the room. He was cold, impassive as ever, but his eyes burned in his grim countenance with a baleful light. Mr. Morton turned from the contemplation of the picture and bowed to the old man. Mrs. Morton saluted him with equal formality. Mr. Pemberton began, in that metallic voice which so grated upon the ear:

"And so, Mr. Henry Morton, you have been

striving to distinguish yourself in a new rôle, that of kidnapper."

"I have simply done my duty, sir, a duty too long delayed," responded Mr. Morton, gravely.

"I trusted to your honor," began the old man, and broke off speaking with a bitter laugh. "Honor, I might have known, is what it means to most men, a fiction, a veil of respectability thrown over doubtful deeds. It ranks in my mind with religion, a conventional cloak of hypocrisy."

"That, sir," interposed Mr. Morton, "I refuse to discuss with you. Religion, thank God, is with me and mine an integral part of life. You will permit me to say that the want of it has darkened your own life and occasioned many of its worst misfortunes."

Mr. Pemberton took a pinch of snuff, and looked at the speaker with a sardonic smile.

"You are a bold fellow, Henry Morton," he exclaimed, "to come into my presence with such language. But what I want to hear instead, and what is so vitally important that I shall insist upon hearing it, is when you are going to restore the girl who went from this house to yours and who happens to be my grandchild. I have permitted the farce to go on for a day or two, but you and she shall dearly rue your part in it."

"I will tell you at once and frankly," declared Mr. Morton, speaking now without a shadow of fear or hesitation, "that as the guardian at law of Mary Pemberton, appointed by her father and mother, I can no longer delegate that trust to any one."

"The guardian at law," repeated Mr. Pemberton, sarcastically. "You were a very long time in claiming that title, and you will be a still longer time in proving your claim."

"That point had better be settled at once!" declared Mr. Morton, coolly. And he drew from his pocket a document at sight of which a slight tremor of uneasiness passed over the old man's face.

"This is a copy," continued the visitor, "of a will executed in due form by your son, Philip Pemberton. The original I have deposited with my attorney in Philadelphia."

Mr. Pemberton shaded his eyes with his hand, as though the light hurt him, but he did not remove his keen and hawk-like gaze from the younger man's face.

"Would you care to examine into the provisions of that will?" inquired Mr. Morton, extending the parchment toward the recumbent figure in the chair. But Mr. Pemberton waved it aside.

"My solicitor will do that," he replied curtly, "and believe me, he will subject to a rigid scrutiny the provisions of a document which has been resurrected from no one knows where so very opportunely."

"It has been unearthed, as you say, opportunely," responded Mr. Morton, quietly, "under somewhat peculiar circumstances, which I am prepared to explain."

The old man sat waiting, but there was something strained and unnatural in his attitude.

"It is well, however," resumed Mr. Morton, "to make clear, in the first place, another clause in the document."

"And that is?" inquired the metallic voice.

"That not only does Mary Pemberton pass under my guardianship, but that she is constituted heir at law to a very considerable fortune. A portion of this fortune belonged to her mother and another portion to her father, inherited from his mother."

"It is false!" cried the old man, trying to rise in his chair and falling back helplessly. "It is a conspiracy to defraud me, to get control for yourselves of this property which you claim for the child."

A dark flush mounted to Mr. Morton's very forehead, and he repressed his anger by a strong effort.

"You are an old and helpless man, sir," said he, "but you must not forget to whom you are speaking."

The tone and manner had some effect upon Mr. Pemberton and he strove to restrain the fury which possessed him.

"This will shall be investigated," he cried, "examined in every detail. That hated child shall not possess the property. Hated! Yes, in all these years, during which she came into my presence a white martyr, with eyes like those of the picture, upbraiding, and with a turn of the head and a movement of the hand so like another. She spoke no word, but the voice of her attitude spoke volumes; and each time I gave her up to Mrs. Miles, to see if that wonderful creature could overcome her mute obstinacy."

Husband and wife exchanged a glance of horror, as the weird figure before them seemed oblivious for the moment of their presence. Mr. Morton, however, rallied the old man's scattered senses by a question.

"You remember, perhaps, on a late occasion, when your rest was disturbed toward midnight?"

"Well, if it were so, what of that?" asked Mr. Pemberton, his attention immediately arrested.

"You found the house brilliantly illuminated and Mrs. Miles playing a comedy, as you declared, for some who were outside."

"You heard these words! You were there! You were listening!" cried the old man, highly excited.

"I heard those words. I was there. I was listening," admitted Mr. Morton, quietly. "Mrs. Miles spoke to you of chicken thieves as a possible explanation. She further hinted at attempt of burglary. But Mrs. Miles knew very well that the hen-roost and Hornby Hall were equally safe from those outside. She was aware of what that band of resolute fellows had come to seek, of the identity of their leader, and both facts she kept from your knowledge."

Mr. Pemberton's face had changed, stiffened, as he listened. Here was concealment, at least, if not treachery in the only being he had for many long years trusted.

"I presume," he observed at length with an effort, but it was more as though he were arguing with himself than addressing his listeners, "I presume she did not wish do disturb my rest with the tales."

"She did not wish you to know that the missing will had been taken from its hiding-place in the long barn."

"What do you mean? What are you talking about?" cried the old man, in visible agitation. "She told me she had searched the long barn and there was not so much as a scrap of paper there."

"There were a good many others," said Mr. Morton, significantly, "even if the particular scrap of paper she was in search of failed to reach her eyes."

"Explain yourself, and at once!"

"That I am about to do, if you will give me your attention."

"One moment," interrupted Mr. Pemberton, and he impatiently touched the bell, which jerked his attendant into the room. "Shut out some of that light," he commanded.

The man obeyed, drawing down the Venetian blind so that the last rays of the afternoon sun should not fall across the aged face, to display its changes. That sole ray of heaven's blessedness that ever entered Hornby being shut out, the room took on an indescribable dinginess and a sinister darkness.

"Now, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Pemberton, and the tale was begun.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. MORTON'S TALE, WHICH UNVEILS THE MYSTERY.

"I WAS the leader in that enterprise," began Mr. Morton, "of the other night. I had been given a clue to the mystery of years, and had some reason to believe that your—that Philip—"

The old man started as if an adder had stung him.

"Spare me," he cried, "as much as possible all reference to Philip Pemberton."

"I am afraid," objected Mr. Morton, "that his name must necessarily come into my narrative, but I beg of you to hear me out patiently. I am convinced that you will not regret having done so."

"Begin, then, that you may the sooner end," snapped Mr. Pemberton, irritably.

"It is my firm belief that in concealing his last will and testament in the long barn, Philip Pemberton so acted because he feared and distrusted Mrs. Miles."

Mr. Morton paused. In the dimness he could not see the old man's face, and only a harsh "Go on!" greeted the remark.

"He hid it away, then, and it remained in the hiding-place till I discovered it. In the many visits which Mrs. Miles paid secretly and by night to the long barn, that providence which protects the innocent concealed from her this document, which she would assuredly have destroyed, with another to which we shall come later."

"You have made quite a number of gratuitous assertions," interrupted Mr. Pemberton, "some of which you may later be called upon to prove; but, proceed to fact."

"Now, though Mrs. Miles did not discover the document, she was quite familiar with the loft above the long barn, which she used, indeed, for a variety of purposes. As it was a place impossible of access without a ladder, it was her custom to carry thither a light ladder from the neighboring granary. This ladder was destroyed by fire when the barn was burned, and Mrs. Miles had been thus far unable or unwilling to replace it by another. Perhaps she was afraid that such a proceeding on her part might awaken suspicion or attract some one else's attention to the long barn. But as I have reason to

think, it was a source of anxiety to her that she no longer had access to the loft, where, indeed, she had much at stake. She had her own secrets there and an accumulation of evidence against herself. This was one of those errors of judgment on the part of the wicked, which seem to be permitted for useful ends. She trusted to the fact that the servants of the Hall were old and slow-witted, completely subservient to her will, and that no stranger frequented the premises. So, in the loft of the long barn was discovered the other night the key to the mystery, to the chain of mysteries, which so long seemed to encircle Hornby Hall."

Old Mr. Pemberton was erect, eager, by this time, but he gave no sign, save a tremulous movement of his hands on the arm of his invalid-chair.

"To recur to the past," Mr. Morton resumed after a pause, "Philip Pemberton was not always as prudent or economical in financial affairs as his father might have desired, but he was with all his faults the soul of honor and it cut him to the quick when, on one occasion, he was accused of having sold his militia uniform to pay some debt."

"He did dispose of it," interposed the old man, sharply and decidedly.

Mr. Morton shook his head.

"In view of Philip's own positive denial and my knowledge of his character, I never believed that he did so," Mr. Morton declared; "the proof has come to hand. The uniform, rolled into a bundle, was found in the loft of the long barn."

Mr. Pemberton started.

"Impossible!" he cried, harshly.

"It can be produced," said Mr. Morton.

"Who could have put it there?"

"Who, but one bearing enmity against Philip and seeking to put enmity between him and his father?"

"And that was?"

"Mrs. Miles; at least everything points to such a conclusion," declared Mr. Morton. "But to proceed: This matter of the uniform was one of many incidents which set father against son. These differences culminated in a quarrel, and a blow and a fall which were supposed to have caused Philip's death."

"Supposed?" gasped the old man.

"Falsely supposed," resumed Mr. Morton. "The fall would have been quite insufficient to cause death. A sleeping powder was administered secretly by Mrs. Miles. The patient never awoke."

Mr. Pemberton gave a cry, which those who heard it would remember to their dying day.

"Mrs. Miles was caught in the act by Bessie Pemberton. She fled from the room to summon aid, but was seized and overpowered by Mrs. Miles and her husband and conveyed to the loft over the long barn, where she was detained a prisoner. In the end, she partially lost her reason and was persuaded by Mrs. Miles to go abroad in the care of her maid, where, as you know, she died."

"Stop, sir, stop!" interrupted Mr. Pemberton. "This is a romance you are constructing. Bessie Pemberton, having been witness to the blow and the fall, accused me in her heart of having killed her husband and my son. She fled from the house, forgetful of long years of kindness, without giving me an opportunity to explain. She fled, as you say, to Europe, where she died."

"That is what you believed, what you have been led to believe all these years," corrected Mr. Morton, "but my story is nevertheless the true one and I have it here in writing, from Bessie Pemberton herself."

"You have it there in her writing?" echoed the old man, passing his hand over his head, as one bewildered.

"Yes, in her writing, which I know well," replied Mr. Morton, taking from his breast pocket a worn and soiled piece of paper. "This was found by me

in the same secret hiding-place which contained Philip's will, and, as you will see, it refers to the circumstance of the will's concealment there."

He handed the paper to the old man, who took it with trembling fingers and began to read. All was as Henry Morton had said. The paper, as follows, began with the solemnity of legal form and ended in a hurried scrawl:

"I, Bessie Pemberton, being now of sound mind, but not knowing how long my reason may stand the strain of these terrible events, desire to place on record my knowledge of all that has recently occurred, and to assure Philip's father, who has been ever my kind friend, that he is quite innocent of having caused his son's death. The blow and the accidental fall which followed were declared by the doctors insufficient to cause serious injury. When this decision was made known, Mrs. Miles instantly resolved, as I myself heard her say to her husband, to administer something to Philip which should be a quietus. For she feared that on his recovery there might be a complete reconciliation between father and son."

Mr. Pemberton could read no further; the paper fell from his shaking hand.

"Shall I finish it?" asked Mr. Morton.

Mr. Pemberton nodded mechanically.

"Having detected the woman in the act, and heard her avowal of the deed, alas, too late to save Philip, I was seized by Mrs. Miles, with the aid of her husband, conveyed to this dreadful place, whence she may never let me go alive."

What followed was merely a recapitulation of details, and the scrawl at the end became faint, and difficult to read.

Mr. Morton, having folded the paper and given it to Mr. Pemberton, continued:

"In our midnight raid we discovered the explanation of some minor mysteries, which are of interest at this late date chiefly because they bear upon those of greater importance. You may remember, perhaps, Mr. Pemberton, the case of Hester Primrose, who was charged with the theft of certain articles of jewelry and served a term in the county jail, after which she disappeared."

"I remember very well," assented Mr. Pemberton in a strained, unnatural voice, "and up to the time of the theft Hester Primrose had been, as we supposed, a faithful servant."

"Well, the ring and the brooch and the bracelet, which she was accused of stealing, are there in the loft."

Mr. Pemberton gasped.

"You may remember, possibly, a certain Malachy O'Rourke, who worked in the garden."

"Oh, yes, he was an Irishman lately landed," cried Mr. Pemberton, with some return of his sardonic expression, "a liar and a hypocrite, pretending to be religious, and to be devoted to his master, but turning out in the end a drunken, lying, worthless wretch."

"Malachy O'Rourke," said Mr. Morton, "like Hester Primrose, became acquainted in some way with some of the facts above related."

Here the clock in the hall tolled out the hour, with a deep-sounding toll which seemed an intolerable impertinence and an unbearable delay to the old man. For he was leaning forward with parted lips, his eyes alert and eager but touched with a strange bewilderment.

"Malachy O'Rourke," went on the narrator, "was dismissed peremptorily from the Hall on charges made by Mrs. Miles, all of which were untrue. He sought, as you may remember, an interview with his master, which was refused. He even managed to convey to you a note declaring that he suspected foul play in more than one direction."

"I received that note," the old man admitted,

"but as Mrs. Miles agreed with me, and as I supposed, it was a bare attempt of a wretch who had been found out to blacken the character of others."

"It was, on the contrary, a part of the whole scheme, a determination on the part of Mrs. Miles to rid herself of all who could possibly bear witness against her. Malachy O'Rourke will in due time be produced to corroborate what I have stated and to prove his own continued respectability by testimonials from all his employers."

"It has been all a dream, a hideous nightmare!" exclaimed Mr. Pemberton.

"There is one person more," went on Mr. Morton, "who knows something, if not all, of the truth. She is Hannah Barton, still in your employ. Her curiosity was awakened concerning the long barn. In a spirit of mischief, she went there one evening, just as the dusk was falling. She had a wager with Malachy O'Rourke that she would find out what was going on there. She peered through cracks and crannies, and was caught in the act by Mrs. Miles, who punished her by shutting her up in a small room which opens off the long barn. There she was compelled to listen all night to sighs and groans which she believed to be supernatural. Her hair turned white during those hours of captivity.

By morning she was Mrs. Miles' slave, though she discovered with the daylight that it was no ghost in the loft above, but Mrs. Philip, whom she supposed from Mrs. Miles' account to be deranged. She never, as far as is known, from that day to this recovered from the fright nor spoke a word to any one of what she had discovered. But Bessie Pemberton recorded the circumstance and no doubt it can be presently substantiated from the woman's own lips."

Mr. Pemberton asked no further question. His head sank upon his breast and he seemed lost in a kind of stupor.

"What I learned from my cousin Bessie's manuscript was in part, at least, substantiated by my chance meeting with Malachy O'Rourke, who has lately returned to Philadelphia. He thinks he could put his finger on Hester Primrose, if required, who is living in misery in Liverpool. She can give proof as to what Mrs. Miles is."

"That woman! that fiend!" cried Mr. Pemberton, with a sudden despairing rage in his voice. "When I think of the years of suffering she has made me endure, the maddening, cruel years which turned me to stone and made me hate even my son's child—oh, lest I do her an injury, let her depart swiftly

from within these walls, which she has made accursed, from the house which she has turned into a byword."

"Have we the right to turn such a woman out upon the world unpunished, to be a menace to society and to our own peace?" Mr. Morton asked, gravely.

"But we can not make public these things, these fearful, monstrous things," cried Mr. Pemberton in agony. "We can not lay bare to the mockery of the world secrets so long buried."

"We can have this woman arrested on a specific charge," suggested Mr. Morton.

"Let her go, let her go!" cried the old man, and for one brief moment he stood erect, an awful spectacle of despairing grief.

Mrs. Morton, who had remained silent throughout that painful interview, now hastened to the old man's side. All other feeling was swallowed up in pity.

"Bring her here first," he commanded, "that I may confront her with the ruin she has caused!"

The bell was rung and Mrs. Miles was summoned. But her room was empty, and it was evident from its disorder that she had fled. She had stolen down, indeed, and listened at the closed door behind

which her life-story was being told. As each dark page was unfolded, she clenched her hands convulsively, her ashen face contorted into a fearful passion of baffled rage and hate. When she learned that Malachy O'Rourke and Hester Primrose were available as witnesses, in addition to those palpable evidences of guilt found in the loft, she waited no longer.

She stole back to her room, put into a satchel a few of her effects, together with the savings of years. But before she departed from Hornby Hall, of which she had been the evil genius, she paused upon the threshold, and laughed her mirthless, soundless laugh.

"I came here," she said, "a young girl, full of a fool's piety, believing in a God and in a lot of other things. The master himself by his sneers and his jibes destroyed my belief. I heard him laugh at Mrs. Philip, who would never give up her faith. Day after day, year after year, I heard him call those fools who believed in what they couldn't see. Drop by drop, I drank it in and I began to see like him that we all were deceived, that there is no other world and no God. After that I was free to do as I pleased, and I did so. I gave up Church and priests and God, and I became what I am."

She laughed again, then looked back into the hall with a shuddering cry.

"But there is a God, and He has made known what I thought the grave had hidden."

With a light almost of insanity in her eyes, she sped down the steps and away, away from Hornby forever. She walked to the nearest railroad station and there, under cover of the darkness, took the train which would lead her to town, thenceforth to lose herself in the world's great whirlpool. She had little fear of pursuit. She knew her master well and that he dreaded publicity as he dreaded death.

When the place had been searched and it was evident that Mrs. Miles had really gone, with no intentions, as was evident from her preparations, of coming back, relief was in every heart. And as Henry Morton and his wife stood beside the old man, he said, in a voice that was already changed and softened: "Send for her now! for Mary!"

Mr. Morton hesitated.

"Not to keep her—I do not mean that," Mr. Pemberton declared; "she shall never spend a night under this ill-starred roof. But that I may see her in the light of this new knowledge. See Philip's child, knowing that I was innocent of her father's

death. See Bessie's child, knowing that the mother never doubted me. Ah, that faith which she held, and which I strove to destroy, kept her warm and true, a beautiful nature. She would have uplifted Philip too had I let her, and they would have been happy."

The carriage was sent back for Mary, and while it was gone Mrs. Morton opened doors and windows and let in the air and sunshine. She bade Hannah Barton be merry for that Mrs. Miles would come back no more. And in some mysterious way she imparted a new touch of cheerfulness to all the surroundings. When Mary came back, trembling and despairing, believing that she was to be delivered up, there was the door of her unloved home standing open and the irreverent sun straying in, like a careless child, making patterns upon the floor. Mary was hugged by Mrs. Morton and brought straight to her grandfather, who stretched out tremulous, eager arms to her and, then, thrust her backward that he might gaze into her face.

"Bessie's child!" he murmured, "Philip's child! My child!"

After which he cried out to her with a strange, eager earnestness, as if warning against an instant's delay:

"Make haste to learn your religion, child, your mother's religion, and grow up like her to be a pure, sweet, true-hearted woman."

When they all drove away that evening, it was only to return every day to cheer the desolate old man, who was now faithfully tended, not only by his own attendant, but by Hannah Barton and Malachy O'Rourke. The latter was set to work to make the garden beautiful again, for its old-time beauty had been ruthlessly destroyed. And many a snatch of the cheerful and heart-stirring melodies of his native land did the gardener sing under the master's window.

The boys and girls of Mayfair, during each summer vacation, were often found upon the lawn at the bidding of Mr. Pemberton, where bountiful refreshments were served and all games provided for their amusement. Mary was in their midst, cordial and friendly as ever, and quite regardless of her heirship, not only to this great house, but to much more besides. By common consent the past was never touched upon in that little intimate circle, and the countryside at large began in the course of years to forget that there had ever been a mystery at Hornby Hall.

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